

*The New Manila Sound:
Music and Mass Culture,
1990s and Beyond*

A dissertation submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Music

James Gabrillo

Peterhouse, University of Cambridge

November 2018

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

It does not exceed the word limit prescribed by the Degree Committee.

Abstract

This dissertation provides the first detailed account of the mass musical culture of the Philippines that originated in the 1990s and continues to be the most popular style of musical entertainment in the country — a scene I dub the New Manila Sound. Through a combination of archival research, musical analysis, and ethnographic fieldwork, my examination focuses on its two major pioneers: the musical television programme *Eat Bulaga!* (Lunchtime Surprise) and the pop-rock band Aegis. I document the scene's rise and development as it attracted mostly consumers from the lower classes and influenced other programmes and musicians to adapt its content and aesthetics. The scene's trademark kitsch qualities of parody, humour, and exaggeration served as forms of diversion to audiences recovering from the turbulent dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos from 1965 to 1986, when musical works primarily comprised of state-commissioned nationalist anthems, Western art music, and protest songs. In the second part of the study, I trace the New Manila Sound's contemporary revival in popularity through the aid of digital technology, resulting in an expansion of the modes of content-creation, dissemination, and audience participation in the country's entertainment industry. *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis hold a significant place in Philippine culture: not only have they influenced the tastes and identities of their audience, their brand of entertainment has also trickled down to the musicality of everyday social contexts in the country. As the first study of contemporary Philippine musical traditions that combines historical documentation and the ethnographic study of performers and audiences, my research expands our understanding of the country's popular music industry as an influential force that has bestowed on its mass audience assurances of cultural and social authority.

Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	3
<i>List of Figures and Examples</i>	7
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	8

Introduction

Official culture versus mass culture	10
Scholarly contexts	23
Methodology and definitions	27
A penchant for performance	34
Taste, class, and cultural capital in the Philippines	40

Chapter One: Roots of the New Manila Sound

Philippine television industry	48
<i>Eat Bulaga!</i> as phenomenon	56
Popular music in the Philippines	64
Birth of Aegis	66

Chapter Two: The Rise of *Eat Bulaga!*

Mockery and parody as entertainment	70
Influence on popular culture	95
Embraced by the lower classes	106
Backlash from the elites	110

Chapter Three: *Eat Bulaga!*'s Enduring Legacy

Online community-building	120
Digital nostalgia scene	131
Expanding storytelling methods and platforms	135
Broadening class-based demographics	149
<i>Eat Bulaga!</i> 's place in Philippine culture	155

Chapter Four: Aegis's Musical Spectacle

Adapting and developing the birit style	164
A distinct musical identity	182
Aegis's cultural impact	189
Criticism of Aegis	196

Chapter Five: The Resurgence of Aegis

An enduring fandom: online, offline, overseas	200
Classicisation of Aegis	207
Pioneering influence	218

Epilogue: New Manila Sound as Filipino National Culture	222
Appendices	
<i>Appendix A:</i> List of interviews conducted	234
<i>Appendix B:</i> Musical segments on <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	238
<i>Appendix C:</i> Films mirroring <i>Eat Bulaga!</i> 's kitsch style	249
<i>Appendix D:</i> Musical acts influenced by New Manila Sound	256
<i>Appendix E:</i> Lyrics and translations of musical examples	258
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 265

List of Figures

- Figure 1.* A bodabil production in Manila, dated 1949.
- Figure 2.* An advertisement for *Student Canteen* in the early 1960s.
- Figure 3.* Joey de Leon, Vic Sotto, and Tito Sotto in 1989.
- Figure 4.* The band Aegis in 1990.
- Figure 5.* The presenters of *Eat Bulaga!* on 18 February 1989.
- Figure 6.* Christine Jacob and Vic Sotto on 3 February 1998.
- Figure 7.* Mitoy Yonting and Gladys Guevara performing on 3 May 1995.
- Figure 8.* Lionel Gonzaga performing on 24 November 1999.
- Figure 9.* The SexBomb Girls on 3 February 2002.
- Figure 10.* A view of *Eat Bulaga!*'s audience area on 13 August 2016.
- Figure 11.* Alden Richards and Maine Mendoza on 16 July 2015.
- Figure 12.* Contestants of *Lola's Playlist* on 12 September 2016.
- Figure 13.* Aegis performing at a concert in Manila on 13 March 2017.
- Figure 14.* Promotional material for *Rak of Aegis*.

*

List of Examples

- Example 1.* Opening line of the song “Halik”.
- Example 2.* Closing line of “Halik”.
- Example 3.* First line of the chorus of “Luha”.

Acknowledgements

I am tremendously grateful to my supervisors at Cambridge: Nicholas Cook, Matthew Machin-Autenrieth, and David Trippett. Since interviewing me for my admission to the MPhil programme in early 2014, Nick has been a wonderful mentor whose work continues to influence my own. Matthew has lent unwavering intellectual and moral support since I first entered his graduate seminar on Music and the Politics of Place and Identity. Last but not least, David has guided me with utmost wisdom and encouragement, particularly during my final year of research and writing. I am incredibly fortunate to have been given the opportunity to work with all three of them.

I am thankful to numerous professors, staff, and friends at the Faculty of Music. My conversations with Kariann Goldschmitt, who was my supervisor during my MPhil degree, planted the seeds of this project. Thank you to Ananay Aguilar, Chloë Alagband-Zadeh, Ross Cole, Ian Cross, Tom McAuley, Peter McMurray, Bettina Varwig, Ben Walton, and Gavin Williams, who have all aided this project in diverse ways. I am indebted to the administrative and library staff for their support, particularly Hania Biernacka, Emma Chapman, Kate Crane, Alex Drury, Libby Jones, and Helen Snelling. Thank you to Daniel Jordan and Ditlev Rindom for being steadfast confidantes in the past years. Charlotte Bentley, Rachel Becker, Rachel Hodgson, José Manuel Izquierdo, and Juan Pablo Robledo del Canto have been inspirational peers.

My college, Peterhouse, has become my home in Cambridge. Thank you to Steven Connor, Bridget Kendall, Amanda Farnsworth, Stephen Hampton, Saskia Murk Jansen, John Robb, Jill Slater, Leslie Verrees, Gerald Meade, Jackie Mahony, and Celia Sievewright for their guidance. My friends Francesco Ciriello, Luther Davis, Marcus

Goodwille, Ranier Macatangay, Janine Ochoa, Adam Smith, Pallawi Sinha, Vivian Tsang, and Nathaniel Zetter have been reliable pillars of support.

My deep gratitude goes to my sources and respondents in Manila for their trust and time — particularly the producers, staff, and performers of the television show *Eat Bulaga!* and the band Aegis, as well as the numerous audience members I met during my research. I owe a lot to Nachi Domingo, Mimi Ong, and Diana Paredes, who were my primary contacts in the entertainment industry. Thank you to the librarians and archivists of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the Philippine Presidential Museum and Library, and the University of the Philippines Diliman Library. UP Diliman, where I finished my undergraduate degree a decade ago, became my home base in Manila, thanks mostly to the support of the dean of the College of Music, José Buenconsejo. I am also grateful to Philippine Studies scholars Cristina Juan, Jonathan Ong, and Vicente Rafael for their guidance. I met many inspiring individuals at various conferences and would like to particularly thank Ryan Bañagale, Byron Dueck, Greg Reish, Fritz Schenker, and Stephen Stuempfle for their significant advice.

I would not have been able to pursue postgraduate education if not for the generosity of the Cambridge Trust, who funded both my MPhil and PhD studies. My research, fieldwork, and conference trips were also supported by grants from the Faculty of Music, Peterhouse, School of Arts and Humanities Research Development Fund, American Musicological Society, Music & Letters Trust, International Association for the Study of Popular Music US, and Santander.

Finally, my thanks go out to my family — my parents Helga and Jun, my grandparents Uding, Estrelle, and Genia, my sister Jein, and my partner Tyler — for their love and joy.

Introduction

Official culture versus mass culture

On 8 September 1969, Imelda Marcos, the first lady to Philippine president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos, delivered a stirring speech to inaugurate the Cultural Centre of the Philippines (CCP), the country's first state-run national theatre. Before an audience of political and cultural leaders, she proclaimed:

This Centre shall serve as the shrine of the Filipino spirit. It shall be our Parthenon built in a time of hardship, a spring-source of our people's living conviction on the oneness of our heritage. [...] We are young and struggling to understand ourselves, trying to construct the nobler meaning of our race. [...] It is the purpose of this Centre to enrich the minds and spirit of our people and to foster among other people a true understanding of the Filipino self. [...] This then, is the charge that we lay upon ourselves today, and upon all who follow us: to keep this Centre as a treasure-house of the Filipino soul, that our works in stone and story, in dance and drama, in music and colour may remain, for all time, a testament to the goodness, the truth, and the beauty of a historic race.¹

¹ Taken from archived document, titled "Cultural Centre — Opening Ceremony (1969)", in a catalogue labelled "Cultural Centre of the Philippines History: Early Years up to 1975", accessed from the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library.

Since its inauguration, the Cultural Centre of the Philippines has served as the country's primary — and often only — platform for the high arts. The CCP was Imelda's passion project: as First Lady, she appointed herself as the ultimate patroness of arts, romanticising the venue "as the shrine of the Filipino spirit". But what type of Philippines was she referring to — and what type of Filipino was this shrine intended for? Imelda had an underlying political motive, as she was convinced that the CCP could unite the public through the development of a national-scale cultural identity, one hinged on the appreciation of high art, particularly of the universal values of "goodness", "truth", and "beauty". Her principles, however, were centred on Western ideals, promoting the superiority of foreign art forms over local ones. Digging through archival documents in the library of the CCP — a relatively unexamined repository in academic research — I discovered that the Centre's programme for its first six months was strongly focused on orchestras and soloists flown in from Western countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany, as well as performers from China, Japan, and India, although the repertoire of the latter three was exclusively Western art music. All but one of the nine performances held during the CCP's first month of opening featured foreign artists; the exception was the Metro Manila Children's Choir, which shared the stage with an orchestra from Australia and performed English-language Catholic hymns.

Were these ensembles what the state considered official Filipino culture? If so, why were the shows of the Culture Centre only accessible to the minority rich that could afford them? What kind of culture were the rest of Filipinos — the impoverished majority — consuming? As I will show, a musical culture marked by humorous and melodramatic spectacle was emerging on the fringes of the mainstream entertainment industry, attracting a following among lower-class Filipinos. But it was largely discredited as "unofficial" or "illegitimate" culture by the powerful elite class, which may account for the ab-

sence of any documentation or analysis of its history, impact, and enduring legacy. This dissertation is the first study to offer a complete analysis of the emergence of a national popular culture at this time and its legacy today. The scene, which I dub as New Manila Sound, features a distinct kitsch style that materialised alongside not only the proliferation of both a mass media industry and a mass population in the country during the late twentieth century, but also in the context of a state-promoted standardisation of national culture — chiefly through the establishment of the CCP by the Marcoses — which resulted to the imposition and reinforcement of hierarchies of taste and class-based divisions in Philippine society.

Indeed, as soon as it opened its doors to the public, the CCP was accused of elitism by several independent Filipino artists and writers who were disappointed not only by the programming's lack of local representation but also of the institution's expensive ticket prices (Castro 2011, 118-23). In an essay titled "Cultural Centre is Anti-Revolutionary Instrument of Establishment and Therefore Not 'Truly Cultural'", published in the underground publication *Philippine Free Press*, journalist Jose S. Salazar inveighed: "The masses have not become, and will not become, cultured just because, hallelujah, the Cultural Centre is here" (1969, 14). Raymond Bonner, in his book about the Marcoses' political reign, quipped that the CCP was "hardly intended for the advancement of Philippine culture, but rather to entice international artists with whom Imelda wanted to cavort" (1987, 71). But while some members of the public opposed the Marcoses' state-enforced stance on what constituted a national culture, they were silenced for fear of retribution from the military dictatorship. Newspapers and programmes on radio and television critical of the government were threatened or forced to close down. As a former librarian who worked for the Cultural Centre in the 1980s told me in an interview: "There has always been a clear absence of local performers and artists featured at the

CCP — and tickets to events have never been affordable to suit the budget of the masses. But this was a tradition established by Imelda. You may not have agreed with it, but did anyone really have a choice?” (personal communication, 24 February 2018). The Marcoses’s initiatives ingrained in the public that national culture was an endowment bestowed by the state, yet the lower-class majority felt largely excluded from their cultural policy — one that was focused on both the mirroring of Western counterparts and the manufacturing of a veneer of age and antiquity in the perception of the country’s culture.

The national situation before and after Marcos bears some consideration. Marcos ruled the country from 1965 to 1986, running it under a military dictatorship from 1972 until 1981. His reign was marked by terror and excess: he not only plundered state funds and imprisoned rivals, but also censored the press, effectively controlling the creation and distribution of the country’s cultural products. Literary scholar Soledad S. Reyes remarks: “The state would not tolerate anything that could paint a dismal picture of society or even hint that something was amiss in the world” (2014, 13). Marcos enacted a reformation of the country’s political, economic, and sociocultural systems under the guise of building what he dubbed a “New Society”. Under his authoritarian regime, the officially endorsed musical culture of the Philippines comprised of Western art music and a handful of patriotic anthems produced or approved by the government. Such composi-

tions, which focused on themes of hope and restoration, made implicit judgments on local music-making, and the tastes and listening practices of Filipino audiences.²

Ferdinand and Imelda's "national programme" promoted a system of cultural homogenisation that effectively repressed mass entertainment. As anthropologist Ernest Gellner has argued, the concept of nationalism has occasionally entailed the enforcement of one dominating culture that is often foreign or not actually reflective of experiences of ordinary citizens on the ground: "The basic deception and self-deception practised by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population" (1983, 57). Works or products that did not adhere to the state's preferences — i.e. Western, mirroring Western styles, or nationalistic and supportive of the government's agenda — were cast aside and not deemed worthy of inclusion in discourses on national culture.

Marcos's dictatorship was preceded by centuries of foreign colonisation — by Spain from 1521 to 1898, the United States from 1898 to 1946, and Japan from 1942 to 1945. Marcos's national cultural programme — elitist and focused on Western content and aesthetics — therefore replaced the foreign cultural systems imposed by the coun-

² The Marcoses's preferred local composer was Felipe Padilla de Leon, who was educated at the Juilliard School in New York (Castro 2011, 129). His two major pieces, "Bagong Pagsilang" (March of the New Society) and "Bagong Lipunan" (Hymn of the New Society), follow the standard American military march form. President Marcos apparently asked the composer to create Filipino versions of the popular patriotic American march "The Stars and Stripes Forever". Recordings of de Leon's compositions are accessible at the Culture Centre of the Philippines, but contemporary recordings have also been uploaded on YouTube; see, for example, the video, "March of the New Society (Philippines)", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw8zAhilsU>.

try's former colonisers. On February of 1986, Filipinos staged the peaceful People Power Revolution in Manila to overthrow the dictatorship. With the emergence of the political widow Corazon Aquino as an icon of democracy and the nation's new leader, the Marcoses were forced to relinquish their power. The forms of mass entertainment that emerged afterwards, during the 1990s, were mostly escapist fare: primarily musical spectacles on variety television programmes and exaggerated pop songs, which both pioneered the New Manila Sound scene and led to the development of other popular genres such as song-and-dance numbers in cinema, slapstick sitcoms, and melodramatic soap operas.

Predictably, perhaps, the New Manila Sound was not received warmly by the elite and educated class, who shunned its works as uncultured. They even used a condescending term to describe the audiences of these slapstick and melodramatic spectacles: *bakya*³, which comes from the name of the wooden slippers worn by the poor in the provinces. Bakya, as a style and sensibility, “means anything that is cheap, gauche, naive, provincial, and terribly popular” as the journalist Pete Lacaba wrote (1993, 105). The term became a tool for the minority intelligentsia to conceptualise the masses; the elite, satisfied with their cultural diet culled from the West, automatically associated local works made for mass consumption as bakya. In their view, the bakya — originally a symbol of the backward barrios — became a symbol for the lower classes who did not, and could not, know any better. This advanced a way of thinking that considered anything foreign as sophisticated, while anything local — in other words, anything that appealed to the masses — as substandard. Such designation brings to light three significant issues: the elite's condescension of mass entertainment underscores how colonial mentality remained in the

³ Throughout this dissertation, Filipino words are italicised in the first instance, then will appear in regular style in succeeding mentions.

country even after its decades of independence. It can also be read as the minority rich's fear or loathing of the crowd, whom they disparaged as a consequence. Finally, it exposes the class distinctions in the country. To be poor is to be bakya: without the capital to enjoy financial, educational, and cultural resources, the poor have limited access to the commodities and opportunities enjoyed by the privileged class.

Another term invented in the 1990s to describe the kitschy works of that time was *baduy*, which has been used as an adjective to denote the bad taste of the poor. Given that the majority of the nation is classified as impoverished, does this imply that Filipinos as a people do not possess good taste? This was a point Doreen G. Fernandez alludes to in an article titled "Pinoy Baduy" when she asks: "Will most Filipinos therefore remain objects of amusement and pity, even exasperation, in the eyes of the non-baduy elite few? Might it not be more accurate to say that baduy means being Filipino?" (2002, 391). This is a crucial point examined in this dissertation as it provides the first detailed account of the mass musical culture in Manila from the 1990s until the present. Focusing on the case studies of the musical television programme *Eat Bulaga!* (Lunchtime Surprise) and the pop-rock band Aegis, I address the following primary research questions: How did the kitsch musical culture of the New Manila Sound rise, develop, and spread in the 1990s? How was it received by audiences belonging to the upper and lower classes, and what is its place in Philippine popular culture? Finally, how has the New Manila Sound been revived in recent years through the aid of digital mediation, resulting to an expansion of the modes of content-creation, dissemination, and audience participation in the country's entertainment industry? My examination is based on archival research, an analysis of musical examples, and fieldwork involving observational, interview-based, and virtual ethnography conducted in Manila for a combined 12 months. Ultimately, my

study re-appraises established notions of Filipino national culture and expands an understanding of the extensive influence of popular music to Filipino audiences.

Throughout the dissertation, I propose the usage of the term “New Manila Sound” to represent the scene that *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis set in motion, developed, and continue to promote in the entertainment industry and the broader context of the country’s popular culture. “Manila Sound” is a term widely used by local musicians and writers to refer to the mainstream musical scene of the Philippines during the 1970s and early 1980s, when solo and group acts performed songs heavily inspired by Western genres such as pop, soft rock, funk, and disco. The term’s reference to “Manila” is derived from the fact that the country’s mainstream music and entertainment industries were centred in the country’s capital (Osias 2011) and continue to be so in the present. I have indeed retained the “Manila” reference to gesture towards the role of the city in my study, primarily as the home base of the performers, staff, and production studios of *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis. My ethnographic fieldwork was also focused on viewers and listeners, as well as cultural critics, officials, and journalists, all based in Manila. The urbanity and social diversity of the capital city also serves as a backdrop to the class, taste, and consumption issues examined throughout this dissertation — including an ethnographic exploration of how the New Manila Sound’s style and content have trickled down into everyday contexts inside the homes and out on the streets of Manila. While the scene has attracted an audience nationwide — and has generated a musical and entertainment template continuously emulated by other works of art and entertainment across the country — assigning the term New “Filipino” Sound in reference to my subjects does not acknowledge the indigenous and contemporary musics and cultures of the thousands of provinces and islands in the rest of the Philippines.

In attaching the word “New” to Manila Sound, I suggest that *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis introduced a novel musical style that Filipino audiences had never encountered in the past, one certainly distinct from the music performed by the Manila Sound scene during the previous decades. While the two case studies adopted musical and presentational qualities from local and foreign sources — which I examine in detail in later chapters — they were the first cultural products in the Philippines to embody an aesthetic that combined kitsch, humour, and melodrama, which was then presented through musical performance on the nationwide platforms of radio and television broadcast.

The New Manila Sound’s *new-ness* lies in their unprecedented transformation of existing cultural commodities, namely the variety television programme and the pop ballad. *Eat Bulaga!* adopted the variety format from American television and *Student Canteen*, the first and then only variety show in the Philippines, but the programme created and staged entirely new segments that foregrounded musical parody and physical comedy.⁴ As I explain in the next chapter, *Eat Bulaga!* introduced new presentational styles tailored to the engagement of audiences from the lower classes, such as the dressing down of hosts and performers in order to “look like our viewers — the *masa*”, as the show’s producer Antonio Tuviera told me (personal communication, 15 August 2016). *Eat Bulaga!* was also the first programme on Philippine television to focus on absurdist humour, standing out in an entertainment landscape previously dominated by sombre newscasts, quiz shows adapted from America, and family-orientated dramas — all of which were strictly reviewed by President Marcos’s state-run ministry, the Department of Public Information, during the 1960s up to the 1980s. Even after the People Power Revolution of 1986 overthrew Marcos’s military dictatorship, President Corazon Aquino’s early years

⁴ I follow J. Peter Burkholder’s definition of musical parody as a work that possesses humorous intent and entails the placing of familiar musical ideas or lyrics into an incongruous context (Grove Music Online).

saw the promotion of mainly nationalistic hymns and folk-pop music, which were often featured on the radio, through live performances and shows, and on noontime variety shows on television. In their reformatting in the 1990s to focus primarily on comedic musical spectacle, *Eat Bulaga!* thus developed their own aesthetics and content of a musical variety show, producing a format that has been adopted by other musical and comedic programmes on Philippine television.⁵

Aegis, on the other hand, performed power ballads that incorporated a melismatic singing style called *birit* (which the band adapted from *Eat Bulaga!*'s singing competition segments) with a combination of elements from a genre of traditional Filipino-language ballads, the *kundiman* (which became popular during the late-19th and early-20th centuries), and performance qualities popularised by Western pop divas and rock bands. Aegis's power ballads represented a new Filipino music genre that fused elements of both melancholic content and comedic performance, standing out in the mainstream music industry dominated by nationalistic anthems and outright covers of Western pop music.

Furthermore, I develop the label "Manila Sound" to encompass not merely the artists and works produced by a mainstream music industry — as was the term's focus during the 1970s and early 1980s — but also multimedia sites, platforms, and contexts where sound and music play a significant role. These include, for instance, the sounds of live broadcasts and concerts, the sounds of audiences reacting to what they are watching and listening, the sounds of performances streamed and consumed through the internet or on mobile devices by audiences in the Philippines and abroad, or the sounds of pop

⁵ While this dissertation focuses on the new content and styles introduced by *Eat Bulaga!* throughout the 1990s and onwards, there were obvious continuities from the show's original format, such as the performers and staff, the programme's title, its daily broadcast time slot at noon, and the presence of an in-house audience that responds to performances in real time.

songs and advertising jingles blasting inside homes and outside on the streets of Manila. As I will show, *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis have built a broad cultural ecosystem that encompasses broadcast television, the music industry, and online media, resulting to a dynamic and dominant presence in Philippine popular culture that has impacted the construction and articulation of the individual and collective identities of the public. The reach of the New Manila Sound extends beyond a mainstream or popular music “scene” to represent a major shift in the cultural and entertainment landscape — a national scene that has remained popular since its emergence in the 1990s. Throughout this dissertation the New Manila Sound is indeed often referred to as a scene, but it is also cited as a genre, an aesthetic, a performance style, and an ethos.

This introductory chapter continues with an historical analysis of how musical performance has become ingrained in the everyday life of Filipino people, in order to understand the crucial role music plays in the country. I then situate my study in more detail by explaining the country’s rigid social hierarchies, and how class and cultural capital shape the tastes of local audiences. In the first chapter, “Rise of the New Manila Sound”, I trace the roots of the two case studies, beginning with *Eat Bulaga!*, which peaked in popularity in the 1990s and remains as the longest-running musical variety show in the Philippines. Broadcast daily, the three-hour episodes feature musical performances, singing contests, and slapstick sketches starring a group of presenters, celebrity actors, musicians, and amateur performers. *Eat Bulaga!’s* success led to the proliferation of similar musical programmes on Philippine television, in addition to influencing the types of songs and performances produced in the local music industry. Their comical approach to musical entertainment was adapted foremost by the band Aegis, whose over-the-top performances of sentimental ballads showcasing their vocal pyrotechnics, catapulted them to fame.

The dissertation's body looks closely at musical examples from the two case studies, such as *Eat Bulaga!*'s opening musical credits and a segment called *Bulagaan* (Surprise Time), where the programme's presenters deliver jokes in the form of song, as well as the numerous musical contests organised by the show throughout the decade, most of which emphasised contestants parodying foreign artists in a humorous manner. I also analyse songs from Aegis's 1995 debut album, which presented a deliberately exaggerated style of melismatic singing known as *birit*. The brand of comedic entertainment by these two pioneers of the New Manila Sound — characterised by an intermingling of local sensibilities with Western styles — produced not only a distinct musical culture but also a genre of hybrid performances that had never before existed in the Philippines. Furthermore, I focus on *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis's influence on the country's popular culture and examine their effects on audiences and the negative reaction they elicited from the elite and educated class. The New Manila Sound ushered in the growth and continuous development of a lowbrow culture that has remained influential until today, impacting not only the entertainment industry but also the tastes and lifestyles of the public.

Appraising their legacies, I then explore the status of *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis in the current age of interactive online media, reflecting on their continuing cultural significance, revived popularity, and expanding audience reach both online and offline. Digital technology has indeed played a major part in the resurgence of *Eat Bulaga!*'s and Aegis's traction, as I discovered through virtual ethnography. On YouTube, for instance, many of their supporters have been posting recordings of performances throughout the recent years, with the website serving as an unofficial archival platform and a meeting space for communities of fans.

After its peak in the 1990s, *Eat Bulaga!* consistently kept a wide fanbase throughout the 2000s. In 2015, it drew record viewer ratings from a new segment that featured

AlDub, a fictional romantic couple who interacted with each other by lip-syncing audio samples of pop songs. Through the AlDub segment, *Eat Bulaga!* became the first programme on Philippine television to utilise “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins 2006), creating original content that engaged with audiences, such as material that conveyed key information related to AlDub’s storyline and appeared solely online, not on the live television episodes. Through both official and fan-made social media pages, the public continued their consumption of stories uploaded not only by the show’s producers but also by fellow viewers. Through this form of engagement, I analyse how the programme has engendered what Henry Jenkins terms as a “participatory culture” in media — or at least a semblance of one — as producers have ultimately remained in control of the show’s primary content.

In the case of Aegis, the impression that only low-class listeners appreciated the band’s music changed in 2014, when the major arts organisation Philippine Educational Theatre Association staged a musical based entirely on the discography of Aegis. The show was a massive hit that has staged sold-out performances for over four years, attracting a diverse audience comprised of both the rich and poor. Presented on a platform deemed highbrow in Philippine culture — the theatre stage — the music of Aegis from the 1990s was brought back to the consciousness of their supporters, but also embraced by the elite class. This was reinforced more recently, in 2016 and 2017, when the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra organised a concert series titled *Symphonic Aegis — Aegis in Symphony*, where the nation’s leading orchestra accompanied the band as they sung their most popular hits from the 1990s at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. For Aegis, as well as for many of their fans, it was their first time to step into the premier, state-owned performing arts venue built by the Marcoses. Equally notable is that for the other upper-class attendees, it was their first time to encounter the band’s songs, which were re-

arranged in a classically restrained manner. Using these examples as a basis, the diversity of the New Manila Sound's fanbase today embodies a sense of cultural omnivorousness in the Philippines, borrowing Richard Peterson's (2007) analysis of the ways in which upper-class audiences consume a wider variety of mass cultural forms.

In the concluding section, I evaluate whether kitsch can be considered as Filipino national culture. I also explore how specific behavioural patterns in the musical performances broadcast on *Eat Bulaga!* and performed by Aegis have influenced not only other works of mass media, but have also cascaded down onto the streets of Manila: to everyday contexts that have influenced the construction and negotiation of Filipino identity. These contexts include karaoke performances, traffic enforcers dancing on the job, market vendors singing to their customers, and corporate employees performing song-and-dance numbers in office celebrations. Finally, I consider the New Manila Sound as a tool for national renewal: that its emergence was due to the lower-class audience's need to make their voices heard in society, a sentiment expressed through cultural products that rejected the artistic traditions promoted by the country's former colonisers. Through *Eat Bulaga!*'s and Aegis's usage of parody and exaggeration, the masses utilised entertainment to empower their collective identity as a class, thus challenging the hierarchies of the country's stratified society.

Scholarly contexts

The intention of this study, however, is not to rehabilitate these mainstream works on the grounds that their aesthetic qualities have been unjustly neglected. Instead, the project as a whole will attempt to understand the nature of kitsch art forms and assess its significance in articulations of identity, arguing that the country's mass musical culture — both a living and social practice — should be taken more seriously. My study offers a

privileged place to consider the role of music in postcolonial Philippines and to reconfigure our understanding of the value of the country's popular art forms. Mass culture in the Philippines has largely been disregarded in serious discourse, with previous studies on the country's musical practices focused on the indigenous and folk traditions commonly performed by natives in rural areas of the Philippines (see Canave-Dioquino 2015; Santos 2015; Mora 2006; Hila 2004; Rodell 2002; Maceda 1998; Tiongson 1994). There are hardly any academic sources on the country's musical culture during the 1990s, save for Christi-Anne Castro's *Musical Renderings of the Philippine Nation* (2011). Focusing on Philippine music during the twentieth-century, Castro examines the narratives of nation embedded in four case studies: the Cultural Centre of the Philippines; the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company, the country's oldest dance troupe; the Philippine Madrigal Singers, a premier choral group; and protest anthems performed during the People Power Revolution of 1986.

While Castro's book provides the first cultural history of the country from the Philippine-American War of 1899 to the country's centennial celebration of its independence from Spain in 1998, it focuses on classical music and folkloric song and dance in the 1970s and 1980s. There is no major consideration of the country's popular music, although she briefly acknowledges that Filipino songs produced during the late twentieth-century sound like American pop tracks. Moving beyond Castro's research, this dissertation focuses on the emergence of mass entertainment produced during the 1990s, a pivotal decade in which notions of Philippine popular national culture emerged and developed.

Castro, who has Filipino roots but was born and raised in America, wrote that she was taken aback with how the majority of her interview subjects — national cultural figures such as composers and academics — claimed that there was no such thing as

“Filipino national culture”. The academic and musician Jose Maceda, who essentially founded the field of ethnomusicology in the country after returning from Europe and the US in the 1960s, encouraged Castro to look elsewhere, such as the musical traditions of China or Japan. Could such a denunciation be born out of a deep-rooted mindset that only regards indigenous styles and classical compositions influenced by Western art music as legitimate culture? The last two decades have seen many a critic proclaiming that Philippine music and cinema are dead. These include journalists and cultural figures who have had the tendency to refer to the 1970s and 1980s as the “golden ages” of Philippine culture, brushing aside the mass culture of the 1990s as inconsequential. Perhaps in dismissing the New Manila Sound, those who possess the nation’s political and cultural power have failed to value the relevance of mass entertainment in the country’s culture and the construction of Filipino identity. Could it be that kitsch is a version of the country’s national culture — a modern indigenous culture where “the shrine of the Filipino spirit” resides?

Given the scarcity of scholarship on Philippine popular culture, there are three more relevant works worth a mention. David Irving’s *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (2010) examines the relationship between music and colonisation by tracing the process of the hispanisation of Filipino music during the Spanish occupation. Irving claims that the engagement between Filipinos and Spaniards produced hybrid musical genres and practices, an assertion that contextualises my exploration on the significant influence yielded by Western popular culture on the local musical works of the 1990s. Jonathan Ong’s *The Poverty of Television: The Mediation of Suffering in Class-Divided Philippines* (2015), lauded as the first scholarly book on Philippine mass media, tackles the relationships between class and television consumption practices. Ong investigates how audiences from the various social classes in Manila respond to representations of suffer-

ing and poverty on television, whether on news programmes or talent contests on musical variety programmes. Ong's analysis is useful in my understanding of the dynamics of cultural consumption and rigid social hierarchies in the Philippines, which I explore in more detail later.

Most recently, Christine Bacareza Balance's *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (2016) investigates how Filipino-Americans in the United States utilise popular music to express their identities. Balance looks at the performances of a California-based turntablist-DJ group, a Filipino-American performance artist, independent rock bands in San Francisco and New York, and karaoke performances. Framed by wider theoretical approaches in diaspora studies, Balance's work focuses on individuals born and based in America but who possess Filipino roots, arguing against the notion that Filipino-American popular music is simply derivative of American trends. This assertion is particularly useful in my exploration of Manila's mass musical culture as a complex hybrid tradition entirely unique to Filipinos. Furthermore, Balance reflects on the lack of scholarship on Philippine music, underscoring the relevance of my study. As she writes, ethnomusicological studies "continue to characterise Filipino national music through either of two musical modes: the classical (read colonial/European) or the indigenous (read local minority/resistant)" (2016, 14-15). Additionally, Corazon Canave-Dioquino observed recently that discourses on Philippine music are divided into three subjects: (1) indigenous and folk music; (2) religious and secular music influenced by Spain; and (3) classical and popular music inspired by American and European traditions (2015). These three topics are later broadly examined in order to position my research in the context of Philippine music history.

Methodology and definitions

This study reconstructs the musical history of the New Manila Sound through a combination of archival research and critical discourse in print and online publications, analysis of audio and video recordings, and observational, interview-based, and virtual ethnographic research. Given the absence of written sources concerning my two case studies — scholarly or otherwise — the majority of the factual information and historical detail on this dissertation are based on my interviews with *Eat Bulaga!*'s production crew and stars, as well as Aegis's producers and band members. Material concerning the history of the Philippine television and music industries were obtained from documents retrieved from two primary locations: the libraries of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines and of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Founded in 1985 during the last weeks of Marcos's regime, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* is the country's most-widely read broadsheet and regarded by many as the nation's newspaper of record. While there are two other national broadsheets in the country — namely the *Philippine Star* and *Manila Bulletin* — only the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* has a publicly-accessible library of archived editions.

The study's ethnographic fieldwork, conducted for a combined 12 months in Manila, mainly consisted of attendance of live shows and performances, interviews with performers, producers, audience members, critics, and cultural officials, as well as virtual research that primarily entailed the analysis of online postings, comments sections, and fan pages on social media websites.⁶ Meanwhile, I accessed footage of musical performances from *Eat Bulaga!* from archival videos provided by Television and Production Exponents (TAPE) Inc., the production company owned by the programme's executive producer Antonio Tuviera. Recordings of Aegis's performances were mostly accessed

⁶ See Appendix A on page 234 for a log of all interviews conducted for this dissertation.

through a combination of official and fan uploads of audio and video materials on the websites YouTube and Facebook.

My study adopts methods and practices laid out in key ethnomusicological handbooks (primarily Stone 2008 and Barz & Cooley 2008), texts examining virtual ethnographic approaches (Beollstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor 2012; Fielding, Lee, & Blank 2008; Reily 2003; Hine 2000), and similar studies on the dynamics between media, music, and society in the Asian region, such as Purnima Mankekar's *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (1999), which looks at the role of a popular mass medium in ideological constructions of class, identity, and memory. More recently, *Tokyo Boogie-Woogie: Japan's Pop Era and Its Discontents* (2017) by Hiromu Nagahara contextualises the rise of mass entertainment after World War II with changes in Japan's traditionally hierarchical society. Both Mankekar's and Nagahara's works also combine historical investigation and ethnographic exploration with the critical analysis of texts and media, which this dissertation undertakes.⁷

Before proceeding further, I would like to clarify the definitions of key terminology — primarily relevant taste and class descriptors — that are used throughout this dissertation. Foremost of which is the word “kitsch”, a term first applied to artworks that featured exaggerated or sentimental aesthetics in the 19th-century, particularly cheap pictures and sketches found in art markets in Europe (Călinescu 1987, 234). The essence of kitsch is imitation: adapting higher art forms through the amplification or parodying of

⁷ For more work on popular music and class politics in the Asian region, see James Leonard Mitchell's book *Luk Thung: The Culture and Politics of Thailand's Most Popular Music* (2015), where he examines *luk thung*, a hybridised musical genre that has been closely identified with the urban poor, working class, and peasantry of Thailand. See also Ubonrat Siriyuvasak's “Commercialising the Sound of the People: *Pleng Luktoong* and the Thai Pop Music Industry” (1990) and Craig A. Lockard's *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (1998).

their content and styles for the purpose of the enjoyment of a mass audience (Broch 2002, 13-40; Kulka 1996).⁸ In contemporary usage, kitsch refers to objects or works of art that appeal more to popular rather than high art tastes, and appreciated in a knowingly humorous manner. It is also commonly used in a generally pejorative way to describe qualities of tackiness or “cheesiness” of an object or product, attributes that have indeed been assigned by the educated elite to *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis, implying that their musical performances do not amount to a work of true artistic merit based on a criteria grounded on the superiority of Western high art over mass entertainment.

The terms *bakya* and *baduy* are the Filipino counterparts of kitsch, assigned by the upper classes to aurally and visually excessive cultural objects and cheap forms of entertainment, judging them as tasteless. Additionally, the term *jologs* was popularised in the early 2000s as a synonym of *bakya* and *baduy*, used as a derogatory reference to aspects of mass culture and lower-class lifestyles and “a totalising description that derides not only clothing styles and accents, but also even genre conventions, television narratives, and television channels themselves” (Ong 2015, 74-77), including the stars and segments of *Eat Bulaga!* and the members and songs of Aegis. Although the word “camp” does not appear in my analysis, its conventional usage for “ostentatious, affected, theatrical” styles and sensibilities qualifies it as a close associate to *bakya*, *baduy*, and *jologs*. Susan Sontag claimed that the stylisation of camp delights in exaggeration: “The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious” (1964, 281) — an endeavour enacted by the New Manila Sound, as I discuss in my case studies.

⁸ In one of the earliest writings on kitsch, art critic Clement Greenberg defined it as a work or object that mechanically operates according to a formula, resulting to “a debased simulation of real culture” (1961, 3-21).

The terms “highbrow” and “lowbrow” are also used occasionally in this study to describe the class and taste divisions in the country’s highly stratified society.⁹ As earlier mentioned, my ethnographic research — particularly with audiences — revealed that these systems of classification are no longer immutable givens like they may have seemed in the past, revealing fractures in such neat binaries. Yet the educated elite and critics of mass culture in the Philippines (including some of this study’s respondents) have continued to use these English-language descriptors since the 1990s to refer to the intellectual and/or aesthetic superiority of what they consider as high-quality art forms such as Western classical music, indigenous Filipino music, and patriotic anthems — a clear influence from Marcos’s state-enforced national culture. Most works of mass entertainment such as local television programmes and pop music, meanwhile, are adjudged as lacking of intellectual and aesthetic refinement. Indeed, the terms *bakya*, *baduy*, and *jologs* can be considered as the most appropriate local translations of the word lowbrow.

“Mass culture”, “mass entertainment”, and “popular culture” are used interchangeably throughout in reference to the broadly distributed and easily accessible commercial media industries where *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis are contained; notably, these terms are not used here to directly reference Adorno’s critique of mass culture as part of a “culture industry”. While the word “popular” is rooted in the notion of “belonging to the people”, it has been utilised as a pejorative designation for low, vulgar, and meaningless entertainment. Acknowledging the term’s continuously contested meanings and implications, I use it throughout this study to mean “widely appreciated” culture typically consumed through mass media, following Bart Barendregt, Peter Keppy, and Henk Schulte Nordholt’s recent definition (2017, 10).

⁹ The terms have scientific origins, tracing back to the nineteenth-century science of phrenology, which considered the shape and size of the cranium as indicative of one’s intellectual and affective traits; the higher the forehead, the more intelligent the individual (see Tomlinson 2005).

The word “mass” often appears in this dissertation on its own, as a direct translation of the Filipino *masa*, a common term for the lower-class majority and their tastes, lifestyles, and preferences; several of my interview subjects, particularly producers and critics, frequently used the word to describe the audiences of my primary case studies. Examining how the early twentieth-century literary intelligentsia in England responded to the new phenomenon of mass culture, John Carey’s *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) explored the origins of the term: “The ‘mass’ is, of course, a fiction. Its function, as a linguistic device, is to eliminate the human status of the majority of people — or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make users of the term, in their own esteem, superior.”¹⁰

Carey credited the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset for providing one of the first comprehensive accounts of the advent of mass culture in the twentieth century. In *The Revolt of the Masses* (1932), Ortega y Gasset traced the origins of the word “mass” to the population explosion that occurred during the late 1800s and early 1900s, when Europe produced “a gigantic mass of humanity which, launched like a torrent over the historic area, has inundated it” (54). The population increase led to overcrowding and, consequently, to the intrusion of private spaces, particularly those of the elite classes. Due to their sheer number, the masses also acquired social power, which Ortega y Gasset saw as a threat to civilisation. It can be speculated that the population explosion in the Philippines during the 1990s — from around 48 million people in 1980 to 77 mil-

¹⁰ Carey suggested that the intelligentsia shunned mass culture as a form of self-defence:

“Dreaming of the extermination or sterilisation of the mass, or denying that the masses were real people was [...] an imaginative refuge for early twentieth-century intellectuals” (1992, 15).

lion in 2000 (Philippine Statistics Authority)¹¹ — may have triggered feelings of embitterment from the upper-class minority towards the lower-class majority; conversely, it may have also led to a democratisation of taste in Filipino society. *Masa* indeed became a standard descriptor in the country around the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Considering the intricacies of the term “mass”, Raymond Williams suggested that the grouping revolves around a binary opposition, with one side connoting a “low, ignorant, unstable” mob, the other a populace representing a “potentially positive social force” (1983, 195). The former was a typical description assigned to the mass audience that supported the products of the New Manila Sound in the 1990s. The latter — that the mass could become a social force — is a notion put forward in the dissertation’s closing section. I consider the New Manila Sound’s brand of kitsch entertainment a reaction to the seriousness and sombreness of the country’s political and cultural spheres during the decades that preceded its proliferation. Its comical performances served as a distraction to listeners and viewers.

The affordable and popular platforms that the New Manila Sound established served as sites of empowerment for the Filipino masses. The musical performances of *Eat Bulaga!* and *Aegis* provided for audiences alternatives to the national cultural programmes promoted during the Marcos regime and, subsequently, the People Power Revolution and Aquino’s first years of governance, which cultivated a musical culture dominated by protest and patriotic hymns. Moreover, the New Manila Sound adapted foreign genres and styles, but presented them through performances of parody, mockery, and caricature. Such reworking and reshaping of foreign models can be interpreted as em-

¹¹ Taken from the Census of Population and Housing page on the official website of the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country’s central statistical institution for primary data collection; <<https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/census/population-and-housing>>.

powering acts that allow the lower-class majority to gain a more significant status within the country's cultural system.

In creating their own musical style and performance aesthetic — centred on kitsch humour and melodrama — the New Manila Sound subverted the proclamations and considerations of the upper-class elites on what amounts as legitimate and acceptable forms of Filipino culture. As Mikhail Bakhtin wrote, “carnavalesque” public celebrations — in this case, *Eat Bulaga!*s and Aegis’s musical spectacles broadcast through radio, television, online platforms, and live stagings — have the ability to momentarily suspend the hierarchies of highly-stratified societies (1968, 10). The New Manila Sound scene embodies how music has become a powerful tool of cultural self-expression that has enabled affirmations of class and community within lower-class performers and audiences.¹²

The New Manila Sound’s performances were mostly devoid of social and political commentary, with the scene’s escapist enterprise providing solace from the country’s socio-political struggles. Through its musical presentations, the New Manila Sound provided alternatives to the nationalistic and patriotic musical works promoted by the state. This assertion echoes Gavin Steingo’s recent consideration of how politics and aesthetics intertwine in musical cultures: he examines how kwaito — a form of electronic music that has developed alongside the democratisation of South Africa over the past two decades — has become an empowering device that “paradoxically engages South Africa’s

¹² The empowerment of the masses embodied by the New Manila Sound echoes the manner in which Filipinos adopted aspects of European music during the Spanish colonial era from 1521 to 1898 — doing so within their own cultural frameworks of references and meaning. As discussed in the succeeding pages, their musical mimicry “eventually provided an officially sanctioned avenue for contesting colonial authority” and the hegemonic power structures imposed by the Spaniards (Irving 2010, 99).

crucial social and political problems by, in fact, seeming to ignore them” (2016, 2). In its avoidance of portraying the country’s dire conditions, the New Manila Sound established counter social realities and new sensory possibilities for its mass audience, and in the process demonstrating the complex manner in which music and performance can be political through indirect engagement.

A penchant for performance

The notion of performing one’s sentiments through song and dance has been a recurring theme throughout the country’s history as Filipinos have consistently utilised music as a vehicle to express their values and ideals. The historian E. Arsenio Manuel described the early modern Filipinos as “a singing people”, performing indigenous songs as they travelled across the country’s 7,107 islands during the pre-colonial era (1980, 328). As these early Filipinos crossed rivers, wrote Irving, “the pulling of the oars provided the rhythmic structure for antiphonal forms of vocalisation” (2010, 35). Originating from about 100 highland tribal groups, indigenous songs can be characterised as music employing the diatonic scale and set to a type of beat. They commonly feature a simple, singable melody and a syllabically-set stanzaic text. Indigenous music is often characterised as strophic, with one melody repeated for each stanza. The earliest vocal indigenous music, performed before the arrival of Spaniards, came in the form of poetic chanting and were later augmented by instrumental accompaniment. Percussion instruments made of bronze, bamboo, or wood — such as the gong, drums, and *kulintang* (a racked chime instrument) — are often used. These indigenous hymns are also performed during rituals for worship, marriage, or preparation for war (Canave 2015; Santos 2015; Tiongson 1994). In a typical colonial reading of the state of Philippine society prior to their conversion to Christianity by Spain, Pedro Chirino observed: “All their government and reli-

gion is founded on tradition, and on practices introduced by the very devil, who spoke to them through their idols and their priests. And they preserve these in songs, which they know by memory, and have learned since their childhood, having heard them sung while they sail, while they work, while they rejoice and feast” (1604, 52).¹³

Music was ingrained in indigenous Filipino culture as a form of expression by which they enacted their daily traditions. Singing songs thus became a fundamental platform for colonisers in their attempts to take over the country. The Spaniards translated the Catholic mass into local dialects, trained native boys as liturgical musicians, and taught Filipinos ceremonial and worship hymns, the performance of which manifested the locals’ devotion to the church and, concurrently, their commitment to Spain (Irving 2010, 99-116). During the Spanish colonial era, music thus became a tool not only for evangelisation but also of pacification, enforcing a hegemonic power structure between the Spaniards and the Filipinos. Later, the locals discovered they could utilise music to ease the strain of Spain’s oppression: they used music as a tool for the covert expression of subversion and protest, as with the case of the *sarswela*, a musical theatre style adapted from the Spanish lyric-dramatic genre of *zarzuela*, which incorporates operatic and popular song. Filipinos used the *sarswela* to hide seditious messages through symbolisms and archetypal characters (Fernandez 1996, 74-94). While appropriating the Western musical idioms of their colonisers, *sarswela* performers also looked to indigenous sources to create a unique Filipino identity in their music. For instance, actors adopted the overstated drama of indigenous traditions; yet while the songs they performed were written in Fil-

¹³ Taken from excerpt documents at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library Reserve Room.

ipino, the melodies and harmonies were appropriated from Western conventions.¹⁴ Such Western musical structures, performance settings, and aesthetics inherited from the colonial era have indeed left an indelible mark on contemporary Filipino popular culture, as manifested by the subject of this dissertation: mass musical works that emerged in the 1990s, which combined the local with the foreign. Filipinos have been adapting Western musical trends and altering them with local content, themes, and performance styles to produce a musical culture that is distinctly their own.

The Americans employed a similar colonial system of patronage to disseminate their culture to the Filipinos. After emerging as the triumphant party during the Spanish-American War of 1898, the US made the Philippines a colony as they gained control of businesses, set up their military bases, and imported their culture (Castro 2011, 19). During this time, Filipinos further internalised Western culture; for example, through the discovery and consumption of popular music that proliferated in twentieth-century America through radio, television, and film. When the Philippines finally achieved independence in 1946, it faced the demanding task of rebuilding the nation from the destruction of World War II. The reconstruction was not only of public buildings and private homes — as well as important records of its past that have been housed inside libraries and cultural institutions — but also of societal infrastructures such as the systems of governance and education.

During this period of recovery, mass media, through the aid of technology, served as a pivotal mechanism to disseminate popular culture. The years of 1946 to 1957

¹⁴ In his recent PhD dissertation on Filipino musicians performing throughout colonial Asia in the 1920s, Frederick Schenker writes: “Many Filipinos grew familiar with Western musical practices while under Spanish colonial rule. By the late nineteenth century, musicians from the Philippines were already well established in colonised parts of Asia as premier performers of European and American musical traditions” (2016, 6).

were regarded as the “Golden Years of Philippine Radio” due to the expansion of radio programming and the affordability of equipment. Programmes featured primarily Western popular music, as well as American entertainment genres such as quiz shows, singing competitions, and poetry contests (Enriquez 2003, 22-26). Local artists mostly covered hits from foreign acts, “replicating the originals with uncanny accuracy” (Castro 2011, 38). The shift of the country’s musical tastes — from folk music and classical compositions written in the Western art music idiom, to light American pop — was deplored by many cultural figures, particularly Felipe Padilla de Leon (the aforementioned Juilliard-educated composer of patriotic anthems during the Martial Law era), who wrote: “It is rather lamentable that the creative genius of our composers suffered a great deal with the advent of the new environment which offered nothing but ear-splitting and somewhat distorted music of the jazz type, not to mention the boogie, guaracha, mambo, a-go-go, and others of their kind” (1976, 161).¹⁵ Television, introduced in 1953, brought even more of America’s brand of entertainment to the country. Programming was primarily comprised of syndicated American genres such as sitcoms and quiz shows (Del Mundo 2003, 7), as examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Observing the heterogeneity of musical traditions in contemporary Philippines, Irving writes: “Ranging from traditional indigenous practices to Western art music to the latest styles in popular music from around the world, musics in the Philippines are characterised, shaped, and coloured by constant mediation between tradition and modernity, not to mention continuous encounters with external artistic influences and the incorporation of foreign elements into local practices” (2010, 99). Subjected to multiple coloni-

¹⁵ In the same edited collection where de Leon’s essay appears, Jacob S. Quiambao inveighed against the introduction of Western movies and literature, which he argued had “disastrous effects upon the lives of Filipinos since they do not always portray what is good [...] contributing to immorality and delinquency particularly among the young people” (1976, 89).

sations, the country's cultural system has been repeatedly transformed by foreign influences. The Philippines is not an isolated case, as popular music in neighbouring South-east Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia also featured new and hybrid forms of indigenous styles and contemporary (often Western) genres, as societal changes transpired in their nations during the twentieth century (see Barendregt, Keppy, & Nordholt 2017).

In the case of the Philippines, its multiple colonisations led to cultural collisions that then resulted in hybrid formations. What have emerged are syncretic cultural products that fuse the foreign with the local. These products that materialised in the country, during and after the colonial era, were not exclusively foreign or local but rather hybrid genres that incorporated elements of the foreign *and* the local. These hybrid works are by-products of compromises between the syncretisation and resignification of the cultures of the coloniser and the colonised, and not simply the mechanical domination of the former over the latter (Bhabha 1994). As such, identifying the foreign and local qualities of a Philippine cultural product is a complex undertaking since several cultural notions that were once deemed foreign, for instance, have become localised through sustained adaptation by society.¹⁶

The Filipinos's penchant for "mimicry" — Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of colonised people adapting the cultural codes and customs of their colonisers in order to gain greater social capital and thus a more significant status within the colonial system

¹⁶ As Castro writes: "The impact of colonialism on hybridising the arts of the Philippines, including and especially nationalistic music, cannot be overstated. This is a cultural dilemma faced by early iterations of the postcolonial Philippine state in arenas that stretch beyond music. Many expressions of Filipino cultural nationalism, from music to art to literature, incorporate ideas and aesthetics that at one time were considered foreign but became localised through repeated use." (2011, 24).

(1994) — has also been observed by many outsiders who visit the country. Historian Vicente Rafael, examining how the United States has influenced Filipino identity, noted that “various colonial sources and travel accounts from the late sixteenth century to the early twentieth [...] retail this notion of native mimicry”. The natural imitation of Filipinos, Rafael’s sources assert, are a racial characteristic: “Incapable of original thought, they could excel only in copying their colonial and class superiors” (2000, 34). Through acts of mimicry, the colonised embodies “a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, 86).

But mimicry can also be an empowering device for the colonised when utilised as a form of parody, mockery, or caricature, as the two case studies in this dissertation exemplify. The very musical structures and styles that have inspired cultural phenomena such as *Eat Bulaga!* and *Aegis* can be read as forms of reworking and reshaping of colonial structures. In their mimicry of Western musical styles, for instance, *Eat Bulaga!* and *Aegis* desire and deride foreign models to construct their own category of sound. As I put forward later, the New Manila Sound’s novel musical scene exists in a “third space”, Bhabha’s notion of an in-between site where distinct local and foreign concepts interact (1994, 39). In this space, two or more cultures are hybridised and negotiated, challenging the “sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force” (Bhabha 2006, 156).

The humorously fractured adaptations enacted by these case studies indeed demonstrate that the influence of the colonial and the West on Philippine culture is not the monolithic system that several Filipino scholars (including Virgilio Almario, the foremost critic of Filipino literature and the current chairman of the National Commis-

sion for Culture and the Arts) have assumed it to be.¹⁷ In this manner, hybridity and mimicry dispute the conventional modes in which colonial influences have been considered: primarily, as a supreme authority of repression and coercion. This assertion does not disregard the unequal power relations that exist between the coloniser and the colonised: Filipinos drew on the resources available to them in order to operate successfully within the constraints of a colonial rule that was rooted in repression. The internalisation by the colonised of Western cultural phenomena does not mean colonial influence was not characterised by dominance. Furthermore, popular music resulting from hybrid formations also challenge fixed conceptualisations of a national identity, which has been instrumental in provoking opposition from several members of the Philippine cultural elite, a theme that is also later touched on.

Taste, class, and cultural capital in the Philippines

Going beyond a historical excavation of the rise and resurgence of the New Manila Sound's foremost pioneers from the 1990s until the present day, this study also examines issues of class and taste that *Eat Bulaga!* and *Aegis* triggered among audiences and critics. In analysing the cultural clash they have generated, I follow Southeast Asian Studies professor Caroline S. Hau's call for historians to enhance their scholarship through the consideration of the structures of everyday life: in this case, "micro-exercises of power" such as material and economic systems that continue to reshape Philippine realities (2002, 36-70). Class distinctions in the Philippines have remained rigid since the country's

¹⁷ See, for example, Almario's classic book *Filipino ng mga Filipino: Mga Asterisko sa Istandard na Ispelang, Estilo sa Pagsulat, at Paraan ng Pagpapayaman sa Wikang Pambansa* (Filipino of the Filipino: Notes on Standardised Spelling, Writing Styles, and Methods for Enriching the National Language), 1993.

independence in 1946, with the lower class commanding a significant majority. The social structure in the country has been consistently described using the class designations A, B, C, D, and E — categories that have mainly been used for market and advertising research. According to a 2015 report by the national research institution Social Weather Stations, a mere one per cent of Filipinos belong to classes A and B, or the upper classes. Eight percent belong to class C (the middle class), while sixty per cent belong to class D (the upper-lower class), with the remaining thirty-one per cent belonging to class E (the lower class).¹⁸ For the purposes of this study, I use the term “lower classes” in reference to the New Manila Sound’s mass audience comprised of an amalgamation of classes D and E (or a staggering ninety-one per cent of Filipinos), as well as some members of the middle class. My usage of the term is based on how the producers and performers I interviewed have consistently referred to their fanbase: they typically used “masa” and/or “low class” both as nouns and adjectives when describing their audience and market. These terms are understood to represent the majority of the population who are classified as economically poor yet do have access to a radio and/or television set.

While lower-class Filipinos attain social mobility typically through securing a college degree and employment, a marked divide continues to exist between the one-percent rich and the rest of the country. It is worth noting how a description of Manila by the historian David Joel Steinberg from 1982 remains accurate even when assigned to the present-day:

¹⁸ Rafael described the “As” and “Bs” as: “discerning, educated, urban, and economically well-off audiences fluent in English who watch mostly Hollywood movies and the occasional ‘quality’ Filipino film that may have garnered some kind of international reputation”. The C, D, and E audiences, meanwhile, are “less-educated viewers with lower incomes of humbler, perhaps provincial origins. While attracted to Hollywood blockbusters, these audiences tend to prefer Filipino films” (2000, 181-182).

“The squatters in the most notorious slums lack all essential services. [...] In few cities of the world is the gap between the rich and the poor so great. From the residential areas of Makati, Forbes Park, and other subdivisions, a stream of air-conditioned Mercedes Benzes moves through the poverty-stricken zones as if through a separate world. Most of the elegant residential neighbourhoods have high walls, barbed wire, and armed guards to protect them” (83).

In Ong’s study of how audiences from Manila respond to representations of suffering and poverty on television, he identifies class status as a significant and explanatory factor in the audience’s interpretation and judgment. Interviewing 92 respondents, he observed the preference of upper (and some middle) class respondents for Western productions over local programmes, which they deemed inferior in quality: “The upper-class people are often self-aware, even eager to display their ignorance of Philippine popular culture” (2015, 71). Ong claims that such fondness for American programming and distancing from local television “are less indicative of a desire to become American than they are revelatory of local strategies to accrue higher value for oneself within local class hierarchies” (74). In their snobbery of mass culture, the upper class have promoted a codification of taste based on Western aesthetic traditions. Moreover, they have asserted an imagined status as more discerning cultural consumers than the lower-class majority. Such a close consideration of class and popular culture in the Philippines has not translated into detailed musical studies; this dissertation is therefore timely in its examination of musical works that initially appealed largely to the lower classes but recently have been gaining appreciation from the elite. While my study does affirm, to a certain extent, the bounded-ness of class categories in the Philippines, it also challenges that bounded-ness

and illustrates the complexity of class and taste relations. My later invocation of cultural omnivorousness, for example, illustrates that such class categories can be more fluid and contested than is often believed, and that popular culture is a useful way of uncovering this fluidity.

The clash between cultures deemed high and low is, first and foremost, a class conflict. As such, the study of mass culture transcends discourses on art and entertainment, but also crucially entails the consideration of notions relating to hegemony. In the highly classified society of the Philippines, the arbiters of taste belong to the upper classes, the individuals who own and control the systems of cultural production. Although this study is grounded on the Marxist view of economic status as a principal component of power within a capitalist society, my examination considers class not merely as a socioeconomic matter but also one that constructs and negotiates identity. My research traces the growth of a class-conscious identity constructed in opposition to the “official” elite culture in the 1990s, and how, with the upper classes’ appreciation of lowbrow culture in the last decade, the former integrity of elite culture has undergone slight fragmentation. This self-consciously low culture has thus been wielded as a means to mobilise the lower classes against the political, cultural, and social status quo.

Adorno noted that the lower classes are mere spectators, in both the literal and figurative sense, of predominant circumstances of production that are controlled by the elite (1962). His writings are a product of a specific time and place of remarkable social change, and thus his views may be rightly judged as outdated. His notion that cultural production is overseen by the upper classes does remain relevant in the context of the Philippines, where the elites continue to run television networks, film studios, record companies, and similar institutions that hold significant influence over the mass audience. The lower classes, however, are not only marginalised in the context of production and

consumption in the Philippines — they are also essential (Tadiar 2004, 83). As Ong observed, “[T]elevision ratings and advertising revenue depend on the DE market that comprise two-thirds of total viewers and consumers. [...] Local television, being orientated to low-income groups, is assumed to always-already follow generic conventions that appeal primarily to their tastes” (2015, 67, 74). Indeed, as I discovered, the elites of the entertainment industry produced content they probably despised in order to earn profit from and through a mass viewership, a destabilising dynamic that complicates my framework.

Edward Herman and Noah Chomsky have probed how mass media can be used as a form of propaganda (2002). They assert that because media firms are controlled by the wealthy and are thus at the mercy of state bureaucracy and/or private corporate agendas, mass media serve the ends of the elite. The upper class act as a powerful filter of the messages transmitted to consumers; and these messages carry with them ideas that are constructed and construed as natural, contributing to the preservation of an existing social hierarchy. This relationship between socio-economic position and cultural consumption is central to Bourdieu’s model of taste. He claimed that cultural needs are based on one’s social upbringing and formal education: “To the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts [...] corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (1984, 1).

Similarly, T. S. Eliot stated that the primary source of an individual’s culture is the family: “[N]o man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment” (1973, 43). As an individual goes on to experience the world, that first channel of transmission is supplemented by other conduits of tradition, such as mass culture. How an individual responds to a work of art is based on a cultural code of cognition, one formed by the consumer’s background;

classification systems are thus rooted in the class system. The eye, Bourdieu proposed, is a product of history reproduced by education (1984, 1-3): in *The Logic of Practice*, he argued that to see the world is to categorise it: “A vision of the world is a division of the world, based on a fundamental principle of division which distributes all the things of the world to the complementary classes. To bring order is to bring division, to divide the universe into opposing entities” (1990, 210). The mass media, Bourdieu believed, enacted a form of symbolic violence over audiences; that is, covert cultural mechanisms rather than conspicuous control, which enable their imposed systems to be accepted as legitimate. Viewed in this manner, the formation of culture is a struggle between social classes, with taste becoming a key signifier of identity.

One has to be mindful, however, in deferring to such generalised views on mass entertainment. Cultures and their formation, whether in the Western world or outside of it, are overly complex to be explained with a single, prevailing ideological device. As I discovered during fieldwork research, for instance, categorisations of highbrow/lowbrow in reference to cultural tastes and styles are no longer as rigid in Manila today as I had always conjectured, having lived in the country since birth in the late 1980s, right around the emergence of the New Manila Sound. My research also reveals nuances in the hegemonic structure of cultural production in the Philippines. Keith Negus explains: “The industry needs to be understood as both a commercial business driven by the pursuit of profit and a site of creative human activity from which some very great popular music has come and continues to emerge. The problem is trying to bring the two together: most theorists have tended to come down on the side of the corporate machine or the human beings” (1997, 36). Negus’s assertion is pertinent in the ethnography I conducted, which focused on music-making as lived experience and not simply as a top-down cultural imposition.

That said, I have chosen to take some of Bourdieu's (1984) concepts to build my research framework as they continue to provide insight into how cultural preferences reflect and maintain social hierarchies, as Nick Prior argues in an article evaluating the relevance of Bourdieu's claims to contemporary musical research (2013, 181-193). Of particular relevance is Bourdieu's notion that taste is reliant on cultural capital, which he defined as non-financial assets such as education, clothing, and style of speech. Individuals behave according to their "habitus", or unspoken but encoded dispositions that shape broad behavioural patterns. These dispositions, which individuals acquire through processes of socialisation such as the family and schooling, are in turn utilised in the various social conditions and relations — what he termed as "fields" — in which individuals find themselves. Applied to the context of media consumption and aesthetic judgment, the choices consumers make — based on their internalised set of patterns and habits — reflect their upbringing, education, and ultimately their social status.

In postcolonial and post-dictatorship Manila from the 1990s and onwards, the upper classes that have possessed the most cultural capital have held prominent positions in the field that is the entertainment industry. In turn, their power and control over the system have maintained the existing hierarchies in a stratified society. As I argue, however, these assumptions regarding the relationship between stratification and consumption no longer unconditionally hold up at a time when tastes are more open and fluid, reflecting the fragmentation of a previously monolithic elite culture. With the sustained development of digital technologies that impact how consumers access works of art, culture, and entertainment, tastes continue to be subjected to change and expansion. Thus, while the Filipino upper classes continue to be considered elite in the economic and political sense — primarily through the possession of control over major institutions in society — culturally, however, they have become more omnivorous consumers, to borrow

Richard Peterson's term to refer to upper-class audiences consuming a wider variety of mass cultural forms (Warde, et al. 2007, 143-164).¹⁹

¹⁹ Peterson, with Roger Kern, wrote that omnivorousness is not liking everything indiscriminately, but rather "an openness to appreciating everything". Crucially, omnivores remain aware of class distinctions in their society (1996, 900-909).

Chapter One

Roots of the New Manila Sound

Philippine television industry

This chapter provides the first comprehensive historical overview of the entertainment industries of the Philippines — particularly the mainstream television and music scenes — serving as a backdrop that contextualises the dissertation’s two case studies, *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis. I first examine the television industry, discuss the rise of the musical variety programme as a genre, and chronicle the early beginnings of *Eat Bulaga!*. I then turn to the history of the country’s popular music industry, focusing on the post-American colonisation era, and explore the formation of the band Aegis after the dictatorship of Marcos.

The birth of the television industry in the Philippines dates back to 1953, with the establishment of the television station DZAQ Channel 3 — “AQ” representing the initials of its owner, Antonio Quirino, the brother of then President Elpidio Quirino.²⁰

²⁰ Information concerning the history of Philippine television were taken from archival documents from the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines), the national media organisation that provides professional regulations and ethical guidelines for radio and television stations, in folders labelled “Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas Media Factbook”; accessed at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library. Additional details were taken from a brief on the Philippine television industry, titled *Philippine Television: That’s Entertainment*, written by Ramon R. Tuazon and published by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts in 2015; also accessed at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library.

Quirino intended for the network to broadcast political commentary and content that would further the interests of his brother's re-election bid. Airing for the first time on 23 October 1953, the station broadcast four hours a day, from six to ten in the evening, showing English-language coverage of political events, Western theatrical stage plays performed live by local actors, and international films borrowed from foreign embassies; there was no Filipino-language content produced during that time. Later, the station also purchased the rights of American programmes such as variety shows and quiz contests. The high cost of television sets, however, limited the station's audience reach. Quirino himself paid for 120 sets to be imported from America and then distributed to hotels, hospitals, public plazas, and restaurants in order for his programmes to be viewed by as many Filipinos as possible. In 1955, a company named Radiowealth started selling more affordable television sets made from imported electronic parts. Their business model was later emulated by companies such as Carlsound and Rehco, which allowed for ordinary Filipino households to own a television.

By the mid-1960s, the television set was the best-selling appliance in Manila. A handful of television stations — including the two current biggest networks in the country today, ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation and GMA Network — were established during that time.²¹ They produced and broadcast several of their own programmes, which were primarily variety shows during the day and newscasts during the nighttime. By 1971, the Philippines had become only the third country in the world to sell colour television sets.

In an account by the American historian John Lent in 1978, he described how Filipinos were consumed and fixated by television programmes, to the extent that audi-

²¹ The name ABS-CBN was taken from the merger of two companies, the Alto Broadcasting System and the Chronicle Broadcasting Network. GMA stands for both Global Media Arts and Greater Manila Area, the station's initial coverage zone.

ences would watch television most of the day and night, resulting in costly electricity bills. A record from the archives of the ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation chronicled how watching television became a communal activity for Filipinos: “Entire barrios gathered around the set, enshrined in the home of some lucky native who benevolently kept doors and windows open” (ABS-CBN 1999, 86). According to Lent, the television was blamed for plights such as the deterioration of family life and even a sudden rise in the number of epileptic seizure cases in children during that time (178); similar claims concerning the disturbance of the tranquility of domestic life were voiced in the United States as the television set became a “pervasive and ubiquitous medium” in American households (Schulman 1973, 277).

When the country was placed under Martial Law in 1972, President Marcos ordered the military to take over all radio and television networks, effectively controlling the shows airing that time. Most programmes, particularly the newscasts, delivered propaganda for the government. While variety shows such as *Eat Bulaga!* were allowed to remain on air, their content was strictly reviewed by the Department of Public Information, a newly created, state-run ministry. After the People Power Revolution of 1986 overthrew the dictatorship of Marcos, censorship laws were reversed; along with it came the creation of more television stations, particularly cable networks. The industry returned to operating on a commercial, free-enterprise system whereby the networks were

privately owned and revenue was dependent primarily on advertising, a system that applies until today.²²

The Philippine television industry continues to thrive at present. A television set can be found in most Philippine households: in the most recent data provided by the market research firm Kantar Media Philippines in 2014, 92 per cent of urban homes and 70 per cent of rural homes across the country own at least one television set. In Metro Manila, 97 per cent of households own a working television (*The Manila Times* 2014). Gabriel Buluran of Kantar Media Philippines told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*: “TV still has the highest penetration [among all media platforms]. Imagine a TV set is on for six to eight hours per day — it’s the easiest way to reach viewers” (Camus 2015). ABS-CBN remains the largest and most-watched television station overall, with its rival GMA Network not far behind, due in part to the popularity of its highest-rated programme *Eat Bulaga!*, which has been the most-watched show on Philippine television since the 1990s (Kantar Media 2016).

Outside the domination of the Philippine mainstream television industry of the country’s popular culture, an alternative music and entertainment scene is of little account. Because regular or long-term state subsidies for the arts have been, for the most part, nonexistent, there is no major independent or non-mainstream artistic scene to

²² Tuazon, in *Philippine Television: That’s Entertainment* (2015), writes: “Advertising is broadcasting’s lifeblood which makes stations dependent on ratings for survival. This commercial orientation of television is evident in its content, where over 50 per cent of total programming consists of musical variety shows, soap operas, and situation comedies. There is a larger percentage of domestic over imported programmes, although the theme and format of most local productions are modelled on Western programmes.” Accessed from the website of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts; <<http://ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-disseminationscd/communication/philippine-television-thats-entertainment/#>>.

speak of, with the exception of those who manage to secure funding and support from abroad, usually in North America or Europe. While Manila is home to many independent artists, they generally eke out a living by presenting their work in obscure venues to small audiences. These musicians, for instance, are typically rock acts whose repertoire remains heavily influenced by the West. They perform in the underground industry because they usually have been turned down by the major production studios or simply refuse to be part of the mainstream industry's system. As such, they generally do not make their mark in the larger cultural scene. Artists who wish to be seen and heard have to concede their talents to the two biggest privately-owned media conglomerates, ABS-CBN and GMA, which each run their own prominent television stations, as well as film, radio, music production, and even publishing companies. While other minor studios are in existence, they are unable to compete with the audience reach of these media giants.

*

As earlier mentioned, the musical variety programme is the most popular television format in the Philippines, a genre that can be traced back to the *bodabil*, a theatre tradition that became the dominant form of mass entertainment in the Philippines during the 1910s to the 1960s. The *bodabil* was adapted from the Western tradition of vaudeville and introduced to the country via American colonialism. It was brought to the Philippines as early as 1901 to entertain the American troops stationed in the country, but Filipino audiences were soon allowed to attend the shows.



Figure 1. A bodabil production in Manila, dated 1949. Photograph from the National Library of the Philippines.

As seen on fig. 1, bodabil performances typically featured musical numbers accompanied by a live band. Staged inside small theatres across Manila, these performances comprised of covers of American ballads and blues tracks, dance routines, comedic or dramatic skits, and even magic acts. By 1941, there were about 40 theatres in the capital that staged bodabil shows. Notably, the bodabil capitalised on the latest trends in Western entertainment. As an example, when Latin dances such as the mambo and cha-cha surged in popularity in America, they became in demand on bodabil stages. When rock-and-roll bands emerged in the 1950s, local bodabil acts covered their songs. Vicente Rafael notes the bodabil's popularity among Filipino audiences: "It was not uncommon for an audience to cheer on its feet, rabid with fury and frenzy for three hours after a performance" (2000, 39-47).

The features and content of the musical variety programme can also be linked to the time-honoured Philippine tradition of the *fiesta*, a festival or celebration that dates back to the Spanish colonial era when towns commemorated the patron saint assigned to them by the Spanish friars through processions around the barrio, as well as theatrical plays, concerts, games, and pageants typically organised on a makeshift stage in a town's plaza. One guide to the fiesta reads: "The one unifying element amongst the geographical, historical, and cultural diversity of the Philippines is the fiesta. Described as the most beloved institution in the country, the fiesta is the embodiment of everything held dear by the Filipino people — pageantry, drama, humour, friendship, religious piety, and earthy revelry" (Philippine Centre). At present, there are over 800 religious and cultural fiestas organised across the country all year.²³ While variety television shows do not directly reference these festivals in their production, the musical and theatrical spectacle that transpired during fiestas of earlier years must have inspired the programmes that begun airing on television in the middle of the twentieth century, evident in the pomp of a variety show's production and its focus on the staging of song-and-dance performances.²⁴

²³ Based on information taken from the "Calendar of Festivities" pages published on the official website of the Department of Tourism of the Philippines; <<http://www.tourism.gov.ph/Site-Pages/FestivitiesList.aspx?monthCode=1>>; accessed 6 November 2016.

²⁴ Echoing earlier points made concerning how Filipinos appropriated foreign practices in order to acquire greater social status and cultural control, Reinhard Wendt argues that fiestas in the Philippines "were by no means simply a cultural-imperialistic instrument in the hand of colonial masters, used to establish and buttress their power. The same festivals, steeped in the traditions of the Christian West, presented the indigenous population with a means to assert themselves culturally under changed political and economic conditions, and even eventually to resist heteronomy outright" (1998, 6).



Figure 2. An advertisement for *Student Canteen* that appeared on the daily broadsheet *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in the early 1960s. Photograph from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

It was in July of 1958 that saw the premiere of the country's first variety show, *Student Canteen*. Akin to the bodabil, its content and style were appropriated from American variety programmes, which were a staple in the United States from the late 1940s to the 1980s. *Student Canteen* actually started out in 1956 as a noontime radio show on the station DZXL, which broadcast in Manila. It featured on-air musical performances and quiz contests intended to entertain listeners, particularly university students on a lunch break.

When DZXL ventured into the television business in 1958, rebranded as DZXL Channel 9 Chronicle Broadcasting Network (CBN), one of the first programmes it produced was a televised version of *Student Canteen*, hosted by the same presenters of the original radio show.²⁵ The programme's hosts, led by Eddie Ilarde, emulated the ceremonial presenting style of their American counterparts and even adhered to their traditional hosting dress code of suits for the men and dresses for the women, as seen in fig. 2.

Eat Bulaga! as phenomenon

In 1979, the television channel Radio Philippines Network (RPN) endeavoured to produce its own programme that could compete against *Student Canteen*.²⁶ Broadcast on RPN's rival network GMA, *Student Canteen* was a hit with viewers, and RPN wanted to replicate its success. Antonio Tuviera, a producer for RPN, was tasked with the creation of the new show, and hired Joey de Leon and the brothers Vic Sotto and Tito Sotto, a comic trio who found minor fame after appearing on *Student Canteen*, to host the new programme, *Eat Bulaga!*. In an interview, de Leon recalled how the name of the show arose: "I thought of the word *Eat* because it refers to our viewers watching the show while they're eating lunch, while *Bulaga* is the Filipino word for 'surprise', which is what

²⁵ Information taken from a print advertisement commemorating the 45th-year anniversary of the premiere of *Student Canteen*, published on the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 August 2003, page B11. Accessed at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

²⁶ Given the scarcity of scholarly commentary on *Eat Bulaga!*, the majority of the factual information and historical detail on this case study has been taken from the author's interviews with the show's creators and stars: producer Antonio Tuviera, executive producer Liza Marcelo, directors Bert de Leon, Poochie Rivera, and Ruel Icamen, and presenters and performers Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, Joey de Leon, Jimmy Santos, Jose Manalo, Wally Bayola, Ruby Rodriguez, Alden Richards, Maine Mendoza, Allan K, Aiza Seguerra, and Christine Jacob.

we do on our show everyday: surprise and entertain our audience” (personal communication, 15 August 2016).

The programme premiered on 30 July 1979. Produced amidst Marcos’s military dictatorship, the show was overseen by the state’s Department of Public Information to assure that it would not air any type of content critical of the government. This meant that like the rest of the local television programmes that aired during that time, the producers and presenters of *Eat Bulaga!* practised self-censorship and were careful to make comments or jokes that could be deemed controversial. As such, the show’s segments mostly featured sober trivia segments and musical performances of Western popular music — a format adapted from *Student Canteen*.

During its first few years on the air, *Eat Bulaga!* built a steady following yet consistently struggled to compete against the audience ratings of *Student Canteen*.²⁷ In the late 1980s, RPN encountered financial troubles brought about by the country’s turbulent political conditions. In 1989, two years after the People Power Revolution, *Eat Bulaga!* moved from RPN to another rival network, ABS-CBN, where the show’s creators and presenters were offered a more stable production and financial deal. With their new network, *Eat Bulaga!* begun to flourish, which Tuviera and his three presenters credited to the full creative control that ABS-CBN had provided them. They reformatted the programme by revamping the show’s content, as well as by foregoing the formal and ceremonial presenting style that they had earlier adapted from *Student Canteen*. Tuviera said in an interview: “After the dark Marcos years, we wanted to make our audience happier. The show was already fun, but we made it even more fun — and funny, because Filipinos during that time badly needed to laugh out loud” (personal communication, 15

²⁷ According to Tuviera, during the show’s first year on the air, *Eat Bulaga!*’s average audience rating was about five per cent against *Student Canteen*’s forty-seven per cent.

August 2016). Such a statement indicates an intention on the part of the producers to create a programme that would provide audiences happiness — by itself a nebulous concept particularly when assigned to such a massive target market of individuals. For the producers of *Eat Bulaga!*, such happiness is linked to the uplifting of the moods of their viewers through the presentation of diverting musical spectacles. Foregrounded in their segments are humour and laughter, which were lacking in the television programmes that aired during the Martial Law era.

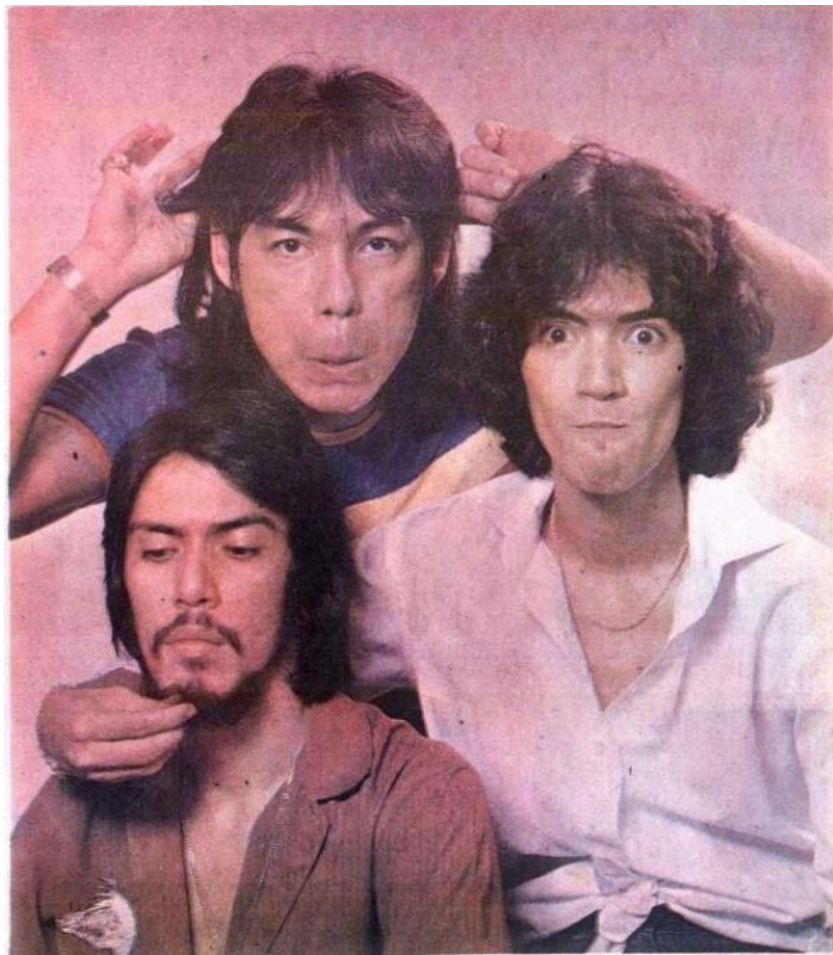


Figure 3. Clockwise from centre: Joey de Leon, Vic Sotto, and Tito Sotto in a promotional photograph to announce the rebranded *Eat Bulaga!* in early 1989. Photograph from Antonio Tuviera.

Tuviera's first order of business was to overhaul the outfits of the show's presenters, who changed their uptight suits, jackets, and tucked-in shirts to casual t-shirts, short-sleeved polo shirts, and denim jeans. In a promotional photograph to announce the re-branded *Eat Bulaga!* (fig. 3), published in newspapers and tabloids around the country in early 1989, the three hosts are featured in an unpretentious and jocular pose. Tuviera said, "We wanted them to look like our viewers — to look *masa* — and we wanted our audience to see themselves in Tito, Vic, and Joey" (personal communication, 15 August 2016). It was a strategy the producers hoped would prompt the self-identification of audiences, particularly those from the lower classes of society, with the hosts. The goal, it can be surmised, was for such identification to build a bond between the stars and the viewers, resulting to sustained support for the programme.

Aside from dressing down its presenters, the show also altered its content, as Tuviera terminated the trivia segments and replaced them with slapstick comedy sketches such as *Bulagaan* (Surprise Time), where the show's stars deliver knock-knock jokes and riddles in the form of songs. Moreover, to rival *Student Canteen*'s long-running amateur singing contest (a segment titled *Search for the Student Canteener*), *Eat Bulaga!* introduced alternative talent competitions like *Search for the Singing Soldier*, a contest for members of the Philippine army, navy, air force, and marines, and *Maid in the Philippines*, a talent competition for women employed as housemaids or nannies. The programme also launched a contest named *Check 2000* for aspiring rappers. Notably, several competitions focused on parody, such as *Gaya-Gaya*, *Puto Maya* (Copycat), a segment where impersonators lip-sync and mimic the appearance of foreign musicians, and *Doble Kara* (Double-Faced), a contest where a performer sings in both male and female voices, with one-half of their body

dressed in male clothing, while the other half is dressed in garments for women.²⁸ These new segments exemplified the novel, unorthodox type of entertainment that the programme introduced to its audience: musical performances that brought parody and comedic impersonation to the fore.²⁹

With its shift towards slapstick humour and a preference for performances that were out of the ordinary, a new *Eat Bulaga!* was born. Tuviera noted, “We became wackier — some people even called it absurd or irreverent comedy — and the viewers loved it” (personal communication, 15 August 2016). *Eat Bulaga!* even exceeded the viewership of *Student Canteen*, which was cancelled in 1990 due to its dwindling popularity (Reyes 1990).³⁰ GMA, the television network that broadcast *Student Canteen*, replaced the show with a new noontime variety programme titled *Lunch Date*, which attempted to mimic the unique brand of kitsch popularised by *Eat Bulaga!*. But *Lunch Date* failed to replicate their rival’s success with audiences and was eventually cancelled in 1993 (Carvacio 1994).³¹

In my interviews with the show’s former and current producers and stars, they often ascribed the success of *Eat Bulaga!* to its consistent ability to identify and satiate the desires of its mass audience. Bert de Leon, the show’s long-running director (unrelated to presenter Joey de Leon), said: “We understand what our viewers want, which is, simply, to be entertained. That’s what we’ve been doing for them every day. Like a delicious lunch meal, *Eat Bulaga!* has all the right ingredients that Pinoys [a demonym referring to the Filipino people] love: songs, dances, prizes, and most importantly, laughter and

²⁸ Information taken from archived production notes provided by *Eat Bulaga!* executive producer Liza Marcelo and directors Bert de Leon, Poochie Rivera, and Ruel Icamen.

²⁹ For a complete list of musical segments and contests on *Eat Bulaga!* from the 1990s and onwards, see Appendix B on page 238.

³⁰ Newspaper clipping accessed at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

³¹ Newspaper clipping accessed at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

joy” (personal communication, 21 August 2016). In other words, the creators of *Eat Bulaga!* determined that in order for their programme to acquire a loyal following, it had to consistently satisfy the audience’s penchant for the diversions brought about by humorous — and often silly — musical entertainment. These previous statements indicate that crucial to the programme’s offerings is a uniquely “absurd” or “irreverent” quality in the content and style of its musical performances, which in turn made the show stand out from the rest of its competitors on television.

Vic Sotto, one of the show’s presenters, described the programme as a form of escapism: “For a lot of our viewers, *Eat Bulaga!* is an escape from their lives, especially for many of our countrymen who are poor and underprivileged.” Tito Sotto, who I interviewed alongside his brother Vic, agreed with that assessment: “The show is an escape from sadness, from the miserable things happening in their lives or from the fact that sometimes they have nothing to eat. (...) The show becomes their food for their soul” (personal communication, 17 August 2016). As the two performers asserted, the narratives presented on the programme have provided a type of transient retreat for viewers seeking to divert attention from their actual lives. Previous research on the notion of television as an escapist enterprise has claimed that the genre of comedic entertainment, in particular, bestows the audience with momentary distraction from their burdens through laughter (Henning & Vorderer, 2001; Katz & Foulkes, 1962). In *Eat Bulaga!’s* case, the escapism of its lower-class audience is hinged on issues of class and poverty, where the show’s humorous musical spectacles have allowed viewers to laugh and be entertained amidst the concerns of their impoverished realities — a matter examined in more detail later.

In a separate interview, presenter Joey de Leon cited a Filipino proverb: “No matter how big a problem is, it can be overcome by one who knows how to laugh hearti-

ly” (personal communication, 15 August 2016).³² The notion that *Eat Bulaga!* engages its audience by giving them “what they want” — daily doses of entertainment through song, dance, and laughter — opens up points of inquiry: What is the show’s purpose, who is it made for, and who determines what the audience wants? When I asked the show’s creators and stars about the purpose and intention of *Eat Bulaga!*, the question yielded similar answers as most of them regarded the show as a medium to entertain the public, specifically families watching together during the weekend, or housewives, children, and students tuning in during the weekdays. Ruby Rodriguez, who has been a presenter on the show since 1991, explained: “What drives me to wake up every single day is to entertain the public. It’s not about me, it’s not about my co-hosts. It’s really about the people watching at home and our audiences in the studio who tirelessly come day after day to see us live. (...) We’ll do anything to make them happy, even for just two, three, four hours a day” (personal communication, 17 August 2016). Rodriguez’s statement echoed a common sentiment expressed by her colleagues: that while their programme has been a platform for performers to showcase their musical talent, *Eat Bulaga!* exists primarily to please its audience. I argue that “to entertain the public”, as she puts it, bespeaks a particular attitude toward their mass audience: a belief that the positivity (or the “happiness”) of their lower-class viewers — in contrast to the elite class A-B groups — is dependent on the show’s capitalist infrastructure of entertainment and spectacle.

Yet the staff and stars of *Eat Bulaga!* have undoubtedly benefitted from the show’s success as the consistent highest-rated programme on Philippine television during the last three decades, making celebrities out of its presenters and turning the show into what is probably a lucrative product, given that *Eat Bulaga!* attracts the highest number of

³² “*Walang masamang problema sa masarap tumawa.*” The exact origin and source of this saying is unknown, but the line has often been used as a piece of dialogue in several Philippine comedy feature films and television sitcoms, particularly in the 1990s.

advertisers on television (AGB Nielsen 2016). It is thus notable that whenever I brought up the subjects of fame and business during my interviews, all of my informants shunned the topic and returned the conversation back to their audience. Tuviera insisted: “It’s not about us, honestly. We are doing this for the masses, for the families eating lunch together at home wanting to be entertained (...) and for the poor seeking a better life by joining our contests and games” (personal communication, 15 August 2016). The refusal of the producers and presenters to talk about how the programme has benefitted them implies a conviction that *Eat Bulaga!* was created to serve the desires of its viewers, and that any forms of success — such as financial profits — achieved by the show and its staff are merely resultant and peripheral matters.

If *Eat Bulaga!* exists for the amusement and diversion of audiences by providing them with the kind of entertainment that pleases them, how then do the show’s producers and performers determine what the audience wants? Ruel Icamen, one of the show’s directors, said that the programme’s content follows a formula: “Over the years we’ve had hundreds of segments and many hosts that have come and gone. When things don’t work, we try something else and then see whether the viewers would respond to it positively. (...) There’s a formula — we now have a formula for the show on what they like, what they find funny or amusing” (personal communication, 21 August 2016). Through years of broadcast, *Eat Bulaga!* has proven to have mastered the act of gauging its audience, as well as remaining flexible to their evolving preferences. This particular point is relevant to the next chapter, which presents a detailed examination of the show’s segments and evolution of content from the 1990s and onwards.

Popular music in the Philippines

From historicising this dissertation's first case study, we move on to the second: the pop-rock band Aegis, which drew inspiration from *Eat Bulaga!*'s kitsch brand of musical entertainment. The band itself went on to influence other artists in the country's popular music industry. As explored in the introductory chapter, the country's musical practices underwent a process of evolution during the American regime (1898-1946), which saw the rise of classical music inspired by the idioms of Western art music, theatre music such as the operatic *sarswela*, and genres from American popular music such as ballads, dance, jazz, and rock and roll. These Western styles continued to dominate the Philippine music scene throughout the succeeding decades. Even the protest songs that emerged during the regime of Marcos (1965 to 1986) were inspired by the politically-tinged folk music and hippie counterculture in America during that time, with tracks that featured simple instrumental accompaniment such as the acoustic guitar and the harmonica (Gimenez-Maceda 1985).

Aside from protest music, the 1970s saw the flourishing of a musical scene called Manila Sound, as mentioned in the introductory chapter. Drawing its influence from the singer-songwriter tradition in American music, Manila Sound featured local artists composing and performing songs inspired by Western genres such as pop, soft rock, funk, and disco. With their lightly orchestrated and melodic songs, the band Hotdog is credited as a leading exponent of Manila Sound; indeed, the scene's name was derived both from Hotdog's hit track "Manila" and the fact that the music industry was centred in the country's capital (Osias 2011). Although some of these tracks were written in English, most of them were composed in Tagalog or Taglish (the hybrid form of Tagalog, English, and Spanish that eventually became the lingua franca of contemporary Filipino culture), altering a pop music landscape dominated by performances of covers of Western artists. Fil-

ipino musicians, however, continued to rely on popular music trends from the West. For instance, when the disco genre became popular during the mid-1970s and early 1980s, Filipino acts such as VST & Co. emulated the disco sound and created Tagalog songs inspired by funk, soul, and salsa. Other successful Filipino bands during that era were Hagibis, who were inspired by the Village People, and The Boyfriends, whose harmonies were reminiscent of the Bee Gees.

In the 1980s, Manila Sound gave way to a new scene called Original Pilipino Music or more commonly known as OPM. It initially comprised of the music composed and performed for the Metro Manila Popular Music Festival (also known as Metropop), a songwriting competition held annually from 1978 to 1985 and “geared towards discovering new Filipino talent in popular music” (Shepherd 2005). Ballads that featured intricate and symphonic arrangements were favoured in the competition, such as “Anak” (Child) by Freddie Aguilar and “Kay Ganda ng Ating Musika” (Our Music is Beautiful), composed by Ryan Cayabyab and performed by Hajji Alejandro; both tracks are widely considered influential classics of Filipino popular music. The most commercially successful acts during the 1980s were solo vocalists who performed smooth, sentimental Tagalog ballads that imitated the musical styles of foreign acts. These local singers include Sharon Cuneta, Kuh Ledesma, Martin Nievera, Zsa Zsa Padilla, Basil Valdez, and Gary Valenciano. Nationalistic, feel-good anthems performed by acoustic singer-songwriters were also prevalent during the People Power Revolution of 1986 that overthrew the dictatorship of Marcos.

It was against this backdrop of political unrest that the six-piece band Aegis emerged during the early 1990s. There was nothing like them in the Philippine music scene, as their distinct brand of sound — inspired by *Eat Bulaga!*'s entertainment style — recast the musical qualities of ballads with garish undertones. The band's theatrical per-

formances featured melismatic singing and melodramatic lyrics that focused on the theme of heartbreak. Aegis, as I show later, pioneered and continue to propagate a novel type of musical style that emphasises deliberately exaggerated performances that amount to dramatic parody.

Birth of Aegis

The band first came together in 1990, when sisters Juliet and Mercy Sunot moved to Manila from the Southern Philippine province of Cagayan de Oro in search of work opportunities. Due to financial difficulties, Juliet, 19, and Mercy, 18, had to drop out of university, where they were both studying nursing. With no formal musical training, they both found employment as back-up vocalists at a music bar in Manila. Several months later, they met guitarist Rey Abenoja, drummer Vilma Goloviogo, keyboardist Stella Pabico, and bassist Rowena Pinpin, who were searching for vocalists for their new group. The Sunot sisters came on board and the band was named AG's Sound Tripper; the "AG" derived from the surnames of their managers, Celso Abenoja (Rey's brother) and Josie Galindo.

For the next two years, AG's Sound Tripper performed in various bars and lounges in the capital, their sets comprised entirely of covers of Western pop songs from the 1980s. In 1993, they moved to Tokyo, Japan where they worked as an in-house band at a hotel bar, performing covers of English-language songs from acts such as Journey, Air Supply, Whitney Houston, and Phil Collins. A year and a half later, they returned to Manila to record a tape of original Filipino songs written and composed by one of their managers, Celso. He had originally envisioned the tracks as soft, slow-tempo ballads — similar to the material being produced by other Filipino pop artists during that time — but the Sunot sisters suggested that the songs be performed as loud, emotive anthems

featuring soaring verses that showcased their vocal pyrotechnics. This was due to an assumption that audiences would respond better to the fresher sound of rock ballads, given their popularity in the singing competitions and musical segments on *Eat Bulaga!*, which the band watched regularly. Around the same time, *Eat Bulaga!* had launched a new segment called *Birit Baby*, featuring child performers who belted out high notes for effect, inspired by the performing styles of American divas like Houston and Mariah Carey. *Eat Bulaga!* introduced the word *birit* to refer to the melismatic singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession. As vocalist Juliet Sunot said, “We wanted to copy the techniques from *Birit Baby* but turn it into our own style. Our approach was to exaggerate the birits even more — screaming and growling the words and notes — to get everyone’s attention” (personal communication, 9 March 2017). As examined in Chapter Four, Aegis’s adaptation of the birit style from *Eat Bulaga!* was not a complete replication of the segment’s content and style, as the band recorded their own original Filipino-language tracks and developed a more severe vocal technique — one that featured a novel combination of melodrama and comic parody, which audiences had never encountered in the past.

Convinced of the Sunot sisters’ suggestion to adapt and feature the birit style, Celso Abenoja re-arranged his compositions to allow for such displays of powerful singing. After recording three tracks, the band submitted the tape to music producer Nonoy Tan, who recalled in an interview: “I was very impressed with their demo. The songs were so beautiful. When I first heard them, I told myself, these are really *pang-masa* (for the masses)” (17 March 2017). Tan believed that the songs’ relatable themes of romance and longing, along with the band’s theatrical performance style, would appeal to the taste and catch the attention of working-class listeners, given their fondness for *Eat Bulaga!*’s entertainment frenzies. Tan then presented the tape to Alvin de Vera, an execu-

tive of Alpha Records, one of the biggest recording companies in the Philippines during that time. In an interview, De Vera said that after listening to the first track, titled “Halik” (Kiss), he was convinced of the band’s potential for stardom. He said, “I had not heard anything like their music before. Of course, they reminded me of foreign bands like Air Supply, but there was simply nobody in the country like them back then — singing that way and entirely in Tagalog” (13 March 2017). De Vera signed the band and renamed the group from AG’s Sound Tripper to simply “Aegis”, which he thought was easier to recall.



Figure 4. One of the first photographs of the band in 1990. Clockwise from centre: Juliet Sunot, Rowena Pinpin, Stella Pabico, Rey Abenoja, Mercy Sunot, and Vilma Golvigo. Photograph from Celso Abenoja.

As a group comprised mostly of women (fig. 4), Aegis stood out in an industry that was more accustomed to all-male bands and where women typically performed as solo vocal-

ists, not in a six-piece pop-rock ensemble. That the band's women instrumentalists played drums, keyboards, and bass added to their striking appeal — as these roles were then typically carried out in the local scene by male performers. Prior to Aegis, singer Lolita Carbon of the duo Asin (who performed from the late 1970s onwards) was the only woman in the mainstream music industry to perform with an electric guitar. As such, Aegis can be considered a trailblazing act in foregrounding the musical talent of Filipino women and women-dominated acts.

In July of 1995, Aegis released their debut album, titled *Halik*, featuring ten original tracks. The band promoted their album through live performances in bars and music venues across the country. Their lead single “Halik” quickly became a hit on local radio stations as listeners often requested disc jockeys to play the track. In September of that year, Aegis made their first television appearance on *Eat Bulaga!* to perform a medley of their three songs — “Halik”, “Luha” (Tear), and “Basang-Basa sa Ulan” (Drenched in the Rain) — which remain as the band's biggest hits. I will examine these three songs in detail and analyse the band's popularity throughout the latter half of the 1990s. I propose that Aegis stood out among the many acts in the Philippine music industry primarily due to their performances that combined both elements of melodrama and parody, as well as foreign and local styles. To further understand the band's appeal and legacy, I also explore their impact on audiences and the criticism they faced from the popular press and elite cultural figures, who considered the music of Aegis tasteless entertainment. For the purposes of a chronological discourse, my analysis begins with the musical segments and singing competitions on the musical variety programme *Eat Bulaga!*, whose kitschy culture then became a significant influence to the powerful birit sound of Aegis.

Chapter Two

The Rise of Eat Bulaga!

Mockery and parody as entertainment

When *Eat Bulaga!* moved television networks in 1989 from RPN to ABS-CBN, the show overhauled its content and tone, focusing on a unique brand of entertainment never before seen on Philippine television, one that was characterised by slapstick humour and a distinctly comical approach to musical performances. As executive producer Antonio Tuviera explained, the programme was inclined to uplift the mood of their viewers who were probably still in the process of recovering from the sombre and distressing era of Marcos's presidency.

The “rebranded” *Eat Bulaga!* premiered on ABS-CBN on February 18, 1989, in a special live production filmed not inside a typical studio, but rather at the Araneta Coliseum, which was then the country's largest indoor arena which could seat 25,000 people. The show opened with comedic banter amongst the presenters (as seen in fig. 5), setting the tone for the programme's new direction that foregrounded humour and gags. This was followed by a musical number featuring the lead hosts Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, and Joey de Leon, backed by about 60 male and female dancers, performing the programme's new theme track.



Figure 5. The presenters of *Eat Bulaga!* during the premiere of their rebranded programme on 18 February 1989. Photograph from Antonio Tuviera.

Eat Bulaga! Opening Theme

Composer and Lyricist: Joey de Leon

<i>Mula Aparri hanggang Jolo</i>	From Appari to Jolo ³³
<i>Saan ka man ay halina kayo</i>	Wherever you are, let's go
<i>Isang libo't isang tuwa</i>	One thousand and one joys
<i>Buong bansa, Eat Bulaga!</i>	One country, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>
<i>Sina Tito, Vic, at Joey</i>	Here's Tito, Vic, and Joey
<i>Si Aiza at si Coney</i>	Plus Aiza and Coney ³⁴

³³ Aparri and Jolo are the northernmost and southernmost towns in the Philippines, respectively.

³⁴ A reference to the programme's co-hosts, Aiza Seguerra and Coney Reyes.

<i>Silang lahat ay nagbibigay</i>	All of them are here
<i>Ligaya sa ating buhay</i>	To bring joy to our lives
<i>Buong bansa ay nagkakaisa</i>	The whole country is united
<i>Sa tuwa't saya, na aming dala</i>	In the laughter we bring
<i>Isang libo't isang tuwa</i>	One thousand and one joys
<i>Buong bansa, Eat Bulaga!</i>	One country, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i> ³⁵

The song was composed and written by Joey de Leon, who claims that he adapted the track's simple and upbeat melody from American uptempo pop songs of that time. He said, "I wanted our theme song to be catchy and hummable (...) something everyone can dance to and something that would get stuck in their head even after the show ends — so that they will think about *Eat Bulaga!* everyday" (17 August 2016). Since the song's debut in 1989, it has been the official theme of *Eat Bulaga!*; played during the show's opening credits, the track's lyrics have often appeared on the television screen whenever the theme is played, encouraging viewers watching from their homes to sing and dance along during the performance.

The song features an uplifting tone, encouraging audiences from across the country — "From Appari to Jolo" — to join together in their engagement with the show and its presenters, and the joy that they provide from the television screen. The nationalist sentiments evoked by the lyrics also alluded to the significance of unifying the country as part of the recovery process of the Filipino public following the dictatorship. In particular, the lines "The whole country is united / In the laughter we bring / One thousand and one joys / One country, *Eat Bulaga!*" can be interpreted as an exhortation towards a

³⁵ All translations of musical examples by author.

collective performance of a national passion for music and entertainment. Performed everyday on the programme for the last three decades, the song has allowed viewers to consider themselves as part of a larger collective sharing a similar fondness for the show, its stars, and the performances presented — as I discovered in conversations with many longtime fans of *Eat Bulaga!*. As one respondent told me, “I don’t know anybody who doesn’t know the words to the show’s theme song — and who doesn’t smile whenever the song starts to play on TV. The whole Philippines watches *Eat Bulaga!* together at noon” (personal communication, 14 Dec 2016).

The musical culture promoted by *Eat Bulaga!* can be viewed through the lens of a cultural intimacy framework, borrowing Michael Herzfeld’s notion that refers to “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (2016, 3). The show promoted a unique type of entertainment vilified by many as cheap and unrefined, but it also served as a vehicle for social collectivity by bringing the audience together through a shared identity among them. For many viewers, the programme shaped their identities, such as influencing their views on what constitutes as humour and entertainment. Moreover, as I discuss later, audiences consider *Eat Bulaga!*’s presenters and performers as idols and models after whom they have patterned their own identities.

Aside from the entertainment of its viewers, *Eat Bulaga!* also endeavours for its audiences to adapt the programme’s brand of humour and amusement into their everyday lives. In an interview, executive producer Liza Marcelo said:

“One of our main goals is for Filipinos to face their problems in life with a positive attitude. There are many ways to do that: for example, by laughing at

the most ridiculous things, or to sing your heart out even if you're out of tune, or to do silly dances at home with your loved ones. We're trying to tell our viewers that regardless of the negativity around them, they can overcome it through humour" (personal communication, 28 August 2016).

Marcelo's claim suggests that *Eat Bulaga!* is a cultural product that aspires not only a form of temporary diversion enacted during the programme's broadcast, but also an impact on the personal lives of its audience. It indicates the show's relevance to the music and television industries and to the larger popular culture of the country.

Among the hundreds of segments that have come and gone on *Eat Bulaga!* since its rebranding in the 1990s, only two have consistently remained as part of the programme until today. The first is the show's theme tune, which is often accompanied by an opening credits video during weekday episodes. During weekends, it is performed live by the show's presenters through a musical number. The second is a recurring segment titled *Bulagaan*, where the programme's presenters, along with guest celebrities and musicians, deliver knock-knock jokes; a riddle in the format of a call and response, where the response contains a pun.

The *Bulagaan* segment is conducted in a classroom scenario, where the performers play the role of students who deliver their jokes to a teacher character played by one of the main presenters, usually Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, or Joey de Leon. Instead of simply delivering the joke's punch line, the students sing their answers by incorporating the riddle's answer into a pop song, usually originating from America. Then, after each performance, the students spin a roulette numbered from 0 to 100 to determine the mark for their rendition. After all the students have taken their turns performing, those with the lowest marks are "punished" by having the entire class throw platters of cream pies to-

wards them. *Bulagaan* is often the closing segment of an *Eat Bulaga!* episode, with the credits rolling on the screen as the show's cast run around the stage, throwing pies at each other. The revelry typically goes out of hand and becomes a free-for-all pie-throwing affair, which would also often involve several unlucky members of the live audience.

The entire segment typifies the show's unconventional brand of entertainment that did not fit into any established comic traditions in Philippine popular culture during that time.³⁶ The segment allowed *Eat Bulaga!* to break new ground in terms of what Filipino audiences considered as beguiling amusement, thus influencing their cultural taste. Furthermore, because it has appeared in almost every single episode of *Eat Bulaga!* since its debut, *Bulagaan* has served as an enduring platform for the show's musical culture from the 1990s and onwards.

As an example of a *Bulagaan* routine, here was one of the jokes delivered during the 7 May 1997 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*, where presenter Joey de Leon played the teacher. De Leon called on Vanna Vanna, an all-female vocal trio who were guest musical performers during that episode.

³⁶ While its content and style pioneered trends in the Philippine television industry, *Eat Bulaga!*'s turn to slapstick comedy can be linked to a broader international scene: elsewhere in the East Asian region, for example, *Eat Bulaga!* focus on humorous segments can be compared to those of *Takeshi's Castle*, the Japanese game show that first aired between 1986 to 1990. On the programme, contestants engage in often mundane and absurd physical challenges. The show broadcast in the Philippines in the early 1990s, although the producers of *Eat Bulaga!* told me in interviews that they did not consider *Takeshi's Castle* as a direct influence. On a related note, from December 2006 to May 2007, old episodes of *Takeshi's Castle* were broadcast as reruns on GMA (*Eat Bulaga!*'s television network), featuring Joey de Leon providing commentary on the challenges.

DE LEON: Here's your question, Vanna Vanna: based on the calendar, which Philippine holiday is celebrated first?

VANNA VANNA: New Year's Day, sir.

DE LEON: New Year's Day is correct.

VANNA VANNA: Knock, knock.

DE LEON: Who's there?

VANNA VANNA: New Year's Day.

DE LEON: New Year's Day, who?

Vanna Vanna sings The Beatles's "Yesterday":

Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Why she had to go, I don't know, she wouldn't say.

I said something wrong, now I long for yesterday.

Oh, I believe in *New Year's Day*.

In this case, the humour is derived from word play rendered through a song appropriated from Western popular music, with the riddle's subject or phrase incorporated into the song's original lyrics. The intention of the gag is for the punch line to run against the audience's expectation, yielding laughter when they figure out the pun.

In another *Bulagaan* segment that aired on 3 February 1998, de Leon once again played the teacher character, while presenters Christine Jacob and Vic Sotto were two of his students, who were appropriately dressed as such characters. As seen in fig. 6, Sotto performed the song with comic earnestness as Jacob broke into a smile.



Figure 6. Christine Jacob and Vic Sotto performing during the 3 February 1998 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Bert de Leon.

DE LEON: Which Filipino rock band popularised the songs
“Ulan” (Rain) and “Kisapmata” (Blink of An Eye)?

SOTTO AND JACOB: Rivermaya.

DE LEON: Rivermaya is correct.

SOTTO AND JACOB: Knock, knock.

DE LEON: Who’s there?

SOTTO AND JACOB: Rivermaya.

DE LEON: Rivermaya, who?

Sotto and Jacob sing the rock ballad “Never My Love” by the American band The Association (1967), replacing the words “Never my love” with “Rivermaya”:

You ask me if there’ll come a time

When I grow tired of you

Rivermaya

Rivermaya.

According to Vic Sotto, the segment is scripted save for some occasional improvised comedic quips, with the knock-knock jokes written by the presenters and performers themselves under the guidance of the programme's writing staff. He said in an interview: "What's not scripted is the roulette because obviously we don't pre-set the scores that the performers receive. It adds to the humour and excitement of the whole thing." Sotto also said that the show's producers had regularly reminded the cast to choose songs that they deem audiences are already familiar with, hence the tendency to select those from the American popular music canon (personal communication, 17 August 2016). The custom of performing mostly American songs on the show exemplifies the mainstream musical culture of the Philippines during that decade, one that was dominated by artists and tracks from America. While Filipino pop artists, particularly rock bands such as the Eraserheads and the aforementioned Rivermaya, were major players in the mainstream music industry, their songs were generally imitations of their Western counterparts in terms of thematic content, as well as musical and performance styles.

While the use of American pop music in *Bulagaan* can be viewed as a tribute to these Western songs, it is also a parody of them. The humour of the riddles, after all, is derived from how performers are able to effectively rework a song to accommodate their joke's punch line into the lyrics. The more illogical and incongruous the punch line's relationship to the original song is, the more absurd the gag becomes, which will then typically yield greater laughs. Thus, the segment's most successful gags — that is, the "worst" knock-knock renditions — are those that best thwart the audience's expected and cohe-

sive outcome. In addition, sound effects such as those of a giggling child, a horn, or a mocking snort are also played throughout the show by the production crew to accentuate the sketches, contributing to an atmosphere of slapstick lampooning.

Comedy is also derived from the mockery of performers who cannot carry a tune. For instance, presenter Christine Jacob was often a source of amusement on *Bulagaan* because of her out-of-tune singing. After she delivered the joke about Rivermaya during that 3 February 1998 episode — singing a duet of “Never My Love” with Vic Sotto — Jacob’s off-key performance elicited laughter from her co-hosts and the live audience. Sotto told her in a teasing tone: “You’re *so* good.” When Jacob spun the roulette and landed on a high mark of 70, she induced even more laughs. De Leon said, “Well, will you look at that? Can you imagine if she *can* sing?” In an interview, Jacob recalled:

“Fans would tell me, ‘You can’t sing — and it’s really funny.’ I took it as a compliment because at least I was successful in entertaining them, right? So I would play it up (...) and I would choose really birit songs that were difficult to sing — those that I wouldn’t obviously be able to give justice to, like [songs by] Celine Dion and Mariah Carey. The more my voice cracked, the more people laughed” (personal communication, 28 August 2016).

Jacob’s self-deprecating performance, which became her routine throughout her stint on the show from 1990 to 1998, illustrated the inclination of the show’s performers to ridicule themselves and each other in the name of the audience’s amusement. *Eat Bulaga!* was the first programme to depict such notion of humiliation as performance on Philippine television. The show and its presenters encouraged a culture of innocuous mocking and teasing, by way of musical performance, to generate laughter from their viewers. As

part of *Eat Bulaga!*'s focus on slapstick comedy, the show has indeed capitalised on the blunders of performers by exploiting their comic potential. The “failure” of performers in these typically musical situations has been highlighted as the show’s primary form of entertainment, a trope that has been developed and employed throughout the years.

This type of comedy based on ribbing and ridiculing that *Eat Bulaga!* promoted during the 1990s through the *Bulagaan* segment was one never before encountered by Filipino audiences, who were more accustomed to the polite humour derived from the political and social satire of the films, television programmes, and books produced during the 1970s and 1980s. They were certainly not used to *Bulagaan*’s emphasis on physical comedy, such as teachers pinching the ears of wayward students, performers playfully tripping each other while walking around the classroom set, and presenters taking part in the aforementioned pie-throwing. Such musical entertainment by way of mockery of self or others can also be tied up to the aforementioned notion of cultural intimacy that Herzfeld (2016) discusses, where moments of “collective embarrassment” provide insiders — in this case, the performers and their audience — feelings and assurances of a common sociality.

It was this brand of humour that was also exemplified by many of the singing competitions organised by *Eat Bulaga!* throughout the decade. In particular, the programme was partial to producing talent show segments that featured contestants mimicking the singing styles of pop musicians from the West. It started with the segment *Ikaw at Echo* (a play on the Filipino words *ikaw at ako*, which translates to “you and I”), a competition that ran from 1990 until 2001, pitting amateur singers against each other as they performed covers of their music idols. One of the contestants who joined the segment and reached the final was 25-year-old Mitoy Yonting, who performed on the show emulating The Beatles, the Australian rock duo Air Supply, and the American rock band

Heart. Yonting's soaring vocals and ability to impersonate the singing voices of both male and female musicians endeared himself to the audience as much as his appearance. During most of his performances, Yonting would appear on stage looking nondescript, dressed up simply in a t-shirt, a pair of shorts, trainers, and a bandana tied on his head, as he did when he performed The Beatles's song "Help!" during the 16 April 1999 episode of the show.

Yonting said in an email conversation: "The joke was that I did not and could not look anything like the singers I was covering. I looked like a *probinsyano* [from the provinces]. Then I would open my mouth and their jaws drop because it's not what they expect. They probably thought, 'Wow, how can someone who looks like that sing like that?'" Notably, Yonting revealed that his intentionally ordinary garment choices on the show were not his idea, but a directive from the producers of *Eat Bulaga!*: "During my audition, I came in wearing a blazer and a bowtie. But they wanted me to look like a jeepney driver, which I understand because it really attracted everyone's attention. Can you imagine? A jeepney driver who sings like Russell Hitchcock [the lead vocalist of Air Supply]? Of course it took everyone by surprise" (personal communication, 15 September 2016).³⁷ Similar to how the producers dressed down their presenters during the show's reformatting back in 1989, Yonting was dressed to portray an image that viewers, comprised mostly of the lower classes of society, would be able to identify themselves with. The element of surprise in his performance — that an ordinary-looking fellow could sing like an international music superstar — added to the novelty of the spectacle.

Indeed, *Eat Bulaga!*'s longtime director Bert de Leon, who remembers working with Yonting on the show in the 1990s, explained that they wanted him to look relatable

³⁷ The jeepney is a type of public transportation vehicle in the Philippines, akin to an open-air bus. It is the cheapest and most common mode of mass transport in the country. The stereotypical attire of a jeepney driver includes a bandana on the head, a t-shirt, and a pair of cargo shorts.

to the programme's audience: "We wanted Mitoy to look masa and it worked. We wanted viewers to idolise someone who looked like themselves (...) so that they would know that they too can be a star like Mitoy" (personal communication, 21 August 2016). De Leon's reasoning conveys that the producers were aware of how their programme extended to audiences an escape from reality. In this escapist enterprise, the show presents stars and performers that serve as aspirational figures whom they could reflect their individual and collective identities against.

The point of the *Ikaw at Echo* segment, furthermore, was not only to showcase the talents of contestants skilled at impersonating popular musicians. Their performances were clearly meant to elicit amusement from viewers, at the expense of the contestants being laughed at. During Yonting's performance of "Help!", for instance, sound effects of giggling and chuckling were heard whenever Yonting belted out high notes and sustained them for effect. As de Leon said, "I think what viewers found funny was Mitoy looking like your ordinary guy, but he's emoting to the max, exaggerating his singing with his eyes closed, kneeling on the ground, and being really dramatic" (personal communication, 21 August 2016).

In another episode that aired on May 3, 1995, Yonting was dressed up like a schoolchild, wearing a cap, a polo shirt tucked inside a high-waisted pair of shorts, and a backpack (as seen in fig. 7). He played up the character, talking and moving like a child. The punch line came when Yonting begun singing Heart's rock ballad "Alone", with his voice suddenly revealing a powerful tenor range. When the song concludes, he reverts back to acting like a child, bashfully thanking the cheering audience. The absurdity of the performance was based on the discovery by audiences that Yonting's juvenile character possessed a startling level of vocal prowess. The parodic quality of his performance was deliberately orchestrated: had Yonting appeared on stage dressed up in conventional at-

tire befitting his age then performed a typical cover of the song, the performance would probably not have yielded the same amount of laughter and enthusiasm from the audience.



Figure 7. Mitoy Yonting, accompanied by Gladys Guevara (left), performing during the May 3, 1995 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Bert de Leon.

After his stint on *Eat Bulaga!*, Yonting went on to pursue a career as a comic actor in various sitcoms throughout the early 2000s. He later formed a cover band whose repertoire consisted mainly of American rock and power ballads from the 1980s and 1990s. In 2013, he joined the first edition of *The Voice of the Philippines*, a reality singing programme based on the original television competition format in the Netherlands called *The Voice of Holland*. On the show, Yonting performed rock songs and ballads including “Alone” and “Help!”, which he performed during the grand final, where he emerged as the winner of

the competition. He has since released a record album and has returned to acting on television comedies.

Two other *Eat Bulaga!* segments took the concept of emulating a popular musician to another level of eccentricity. On *Doble Kara* (Double-Faced), which aired from 1993 to 2000, contestants had to sing in both male and female voices, with one-half of their body dressed in clothing for men, while the other half was dressed in garments for women. Lionel Gonzaga won the *Doble Kara* competition held in 1999 at age 22. His final performance, which aired on 24 November 1999, featured a cover of the Andrea Bocelli and Celine Dion duet “The Prayer”, a popular spiritual-themed track released that year. Gonzaga, wearing a tuxedo on the left side of his body and donned in long hair, make-up, and a gown on the right side (as seen in fig. 8), delighted the show’s judges and live audience as he performed Bocelli’s lines in Italian and Dion’s in English, showing off a multiple octave range and the ability to jump effortlessly from one to the other without showing strain.³⁸

³⁸ Demonstrating *Eat Bulaga!*’s popularity and the lasting impact of the New Manila Sound, this “double-faced” rendition of “The Prayer” continues to be emulated by Filipino performers, both amateur and professional, on television and in music venues and competitions around the country — and even abroad. Most recently, in the summer of 2018, Sephy Francisco flew from Manila to London to join the reality talent programme *The X Factor UK*, where she auditioned with a cover of “The Prayer”, singing both Andrea Bocelli’s and Celine Dion’s respective vocal parts, similar to Lionel Gonzaga’s performance on the *Doble Kara* segment — although Francisco, a transgender woman, appeared only in women’s clothing. Simon Cowell, one of the show’s producers and judges, told Francisco after her performance: “Wow, wow. Well, that was a surprise. I’ve never judged a duo who is one person. This is incredible.” Francisco’s audition, which aired on September 15, 2018, can be viewed on *The X Factor UK*’s official YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/qCQNg27eiR0>.



Figure 8. Lionel Gonzaga performing in the *Doble Kara* segment of the November 24, 1999 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Bert de Leon.

In a brief observation on the uncanny Philippine affinity for American popular music, Arjun Appadurai wrote:

“Somehow Philippine renditions of American popular songs are both more widespread in the Philippines, and more disturbingly faithful to their originals, than they are in the United States today. An entire nation seems to have learned to mimic Kenny Rogers and the Lennon sisters, like a vast Asian Motown chorus. But Americanisation is certainly a pallid term to apply to such a situation, for not only are there more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of some American songs (often from the America past) than there are Americans doing so, there is also, of course, the fact that the rest of their

lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world that first gave birth to these songs” (1996, 29).³⁹

While the musical impersonation segments on *Eat Bulaga!* indeed highlighted the ability of local contestants to accurately mimic the vocal and physical gestures of Western pop stars, assigning the term “Americanisation” to describe their act is insufficient because it overlooks a vital narrative in their performances: its rootedness in parody. As in the case of *Doble Kara*, while the contest provided a platform to showcase Gonzaga’s vocal and impersonation skills, it was at the expense of him turning into a subject of hilarity and amusement, which he and the other contestants did not appear to mind, at least while on live television. His performance could be considered as less of a talent showcase and more of a parody: of Bocelli and Dion, of Gonzaga himself as a music artist, and of the song, a track that was often played during funeral services in the Philippines at that time. It is the sense of peculiar disconnect — and the lack of “complete synchrony” — between Gonzaga’s identity and the content of his performance that turns the work into parody. It is why his act, although performed poker-faced and with a seemingly stern concentration, generated laughter from audiences. Moreover, a reflexive criticism is inherent in such a form of parody: these impersonation performances can be viewed as implicitly critical of the original songs through the act of devaluing them. By placing “The Prayer” in the context of farce, for example, the song lost the earnest quality that listeners typically associated it with. At the same time, these performances may also be read as critical of the Philippine culture that values such “bad” versions of hackneyed

³⁹ Appadurai was reflecting specifically on travel writer Pico Iyer’s visit to the Philippines, where the latter remarked: “I could certainly see how the Filipinos’ brilliance at reproducing their masters’ voices, down to the very last burr, had made them the musical stars of Asia — the next-best-thing, in fact, to having a real American” (1988, 174).

songs. After all, there exists a possibility (however slight) that Gonzaga, or any other given performer that appeared on *Doble Kara*, may have knowingly engaged in their parody act with the intention of critiquing *Eat Bulaga!*'s enterprise and mass viewership: that in laughing at him, the audiences are in actuality laughing at themselves.

Additionally, the *Doble Kara* competition was momentous because it provided a platform for cross-dressing (mostly male) performers to showcase their talent on a large stage. Prior to the musical segment, drag performances were not a common presence on television and other mass media. In my interviews, the producers of *Eat Bulaga!* even claimed that they were the first programme on television to consistently feature and focus on such performances — an assertion that is probably correct as no other television show prior to *Eat Bulaga!* had been recorded to producing cross-dressing segments or contests.

While there is limited historical documentation of drag culture in the Philippines, anthropological observations of homosexuality in the country exist, with the tradition of cross-dressing tracing back to the pre-colonial indigenous era. Native priests, called *babaylan*, dressed in attire for women whenever they performed rituals during births, weddings, and key phases of agricultural cycles (Peletz 2009, 22; Garcia 2008, 184). During Spanish and American colonialism, the open discussion and acts of homosexuality were frowned upon but not considered illegal. Cross-dressing performers nonetheless appeared in the *bodabil* shows of the early twentieth century, although less for comedic value and more for practicality: due to the lack of women performers, male actors had to portray women characters. There is also documentation of gay beauty pageants being held in a handful of towns across the country in the 1950s and 1960s, but they were conducted surreptitiously to a limited audience for fear of being shut down by local town officials or becoming the subject of condemnation by their fellow residents (Lopez 2007; Hart 1968).

Thus, while a culture of cross-dressing certainly existed prior to *Eat Bulaga!*'s impersonation segments in the 1990s, the show was the first to provide these performances a mass medium with a nationwide reach. Drag's ostentation and theatricality — its camp style — certainly felt at home in *Eat Bulaga!*'s atmosphere of kitsch performance and parody. Asked to reflect on the matter, producer Antonio Tuviera replied succinctly via email correspondence: "We didn't intend to make any big statements about gay culture in our country. We just wanted to showcase these talented impersonators and what they could do with their voice and appearance. So we were very happy when our audience liked these segments and found them amusing" (personal communication, 29 May 2018). Tuviera's statement alludes to the significance of the show's early foregrounding of cross-dressing to the current increasing presence of LGBTQ performers in the entertainment industry — and likely the developing attitudes of the Filipino audience towards homosexuality and gender-crossing. In the late 1990s, *Eat Bulaga!* hired Allan K, a gay man, as one of the hosts of the *Doble Kara* segment; he was the first openly homosexual presenter on the show. *Eat Bulaga!*'s rival musical variety programme, *It's Showtime*, has featured Vice Ganda as its main presenter since its debut in 2009 — the first cross-dressing performer to headline a television show in the country. In this manner, *Doble Kara* can be attributed as an early platform for local LGBTQ culture during that decade. At the same time, it can be argued that the segment misappropriated this very culture by presenting drag performers as subjects of amusement, and possibly ridicule, by the audience.

Doble Kara's success indeed spawned other segments on *Eat Bulaga!* that focused on the skillful mimicry of Western musicians, such as *Gaya-Gaya*, *Puto Maya* (Copycat), which aired from 1993 to 1997. On the segment, performers impersonated not only the singing voice of other musicians, but also their appearance and movement. During a

grand final that aired on 14 June 1996, winning contestant Alexander Refran performed Janet Jackson's dance-pop track "Control". Dressed up as Jackson in make-up and female clothing and backed by two male dancers, he imitated the choreographed routine featured on the song's official music video. The video itself was played on a large screen behind Refran, with his live performance cutting to clips of Jackson's for comparison.

The aforementioned Allan K said in an interview that the show was not only looking for the most competent impersonator but also the best entertainer. "They had to be very funny to win. Some of the contestants were too perfect — and so they bored us. You had to have the right mix of strangeness, singing ability, comic timing. (...) The ones who ended up winning were the contestants who got the loudest response and laughs from our audience" (personal communication, 26 August 2016). The segment reinforced *Eat Bulaga!*'s concept of entertainment during the decade, one focused on musical spectacle characterised by caricature and physical comedy. As Allan K pointed out, in order for contestants to succeed, they had to foreground humour in their musical performances; their popularity was hinged on eliciting the chuckles and giggles of the programme's viewers. In turn, this notion reflects an understanding on the presenter's part that *Eat Bulaga!*'s appeal to the audience — and, crucially, the television show's commercial success — are dependent on such parodic performances.

Whether the show's creators and stars intended for the performances on their segments *Bulagaan*, *Ikaw at Echo*, *Doble Kara*, and *Gaya-Gaya*, *Puto Maya* to be viewed as parodies is an unresolved matter — one that divided the programme's producers and presenters. In an interview, director Bert de Leon argued that these performances should be seen as a showcase of talent: "They're not parodies. We're not making fun of anyone. In fact, we're giving people a platform to show off their acting, their singing and dancing. (...) There is no malice involved at all. When audiences laugh while watching the per-

performances, I think it's all in good fun" (personal communication, 21 August 2016). Tuviera, the show's producer, echoed de Leon's sentiments, pointing out that their past talent contests which focused on impersonation were meant to be tributes to the original performers of the songs. "They're also a celebration of Filipino talent (...) and how good our countrymen are in entertaining others," he said (personal communication, 15 August 2016). Such seemingly straightforward claims can be read as a firm conviction that the programme presents wholesome merrymaking: that offending or embarrassing anyone is not intended. Yet it is easy for producers to make that case when they are designated to work behind the scenes, not participating in the parodies first-hand on stage in front of a live audience. From the position of creators and promoters — who stand to profit from the show's success with audiences — their musical spectacles may come across as nothing else but mere "good fun", but the performers (and viewers at home) may of course interpret it differently. Comparing *Eat Bulaga!*'s singing competitions to other reality talent programmes around the world — such as the international franchises of the *Got Talent*, *Idol*, and *The X Factor* series — these shows have constantly possessed an agenda to feature a mix of genuine musical talent with entertainingly "bad" performances. As Matthew Stahl puts it in his study of contestants who are both ridiculed and celebrated on the show *American Idol*, "narratives of failure" (2004, 224) are woven together with narratives of success.⁴⁰ The audience's and judging panel's reactions are usually intrinsic to the entertainment, where the performers' ignorance of how "bad" they are has been close to the heart of the programmes.

While it is notable that the producers of *Eat Bulaga!* consider performances that parodied Western musicians as "a celebration of Filipino talent", their reasoning is re-

⁴⁰ See also Katherine Meizel's article "Making the Dream a Reality (Show): The Celebration of Failure in *American Idol*" where she examines the tradition and significance of "the dismissal of a tragic-comic parade of anti-stars" in the singing programme (2009).

vealing because it implies that the programme's notion of Filipino musical artistry is limited to the lampooning and imitation prominently featured in such performances. Their statements also suggest that the type of musical entertainment that the show promoted from the 1990s and onwards — and was adopted by Aegis in the creation of their own brand of musical spectacle — was grounded on the idea that humorous parody represented the taste of the masses. It insinuated that Filipino viewers collectively deemed playful musical mockery as a preferred source of amusement, and that *Eat Bulaga!* simply satiated their desires by providing a platform for it. In this manner, one may be able to comprehend and justify the motivations of the show's critics who considered *Eat Bulaga!*'s performances as “tasteless” (Legaspi 1994), “toxic” (Argente 1996), and “harmful” (de Leon 2016) (and which will be discussed in detail in a later section); indeed, a culture that places mimicry and parody at its heart can easily be regarded as inherently vacuous, and without an identity of its own.

The show's presenters had a contrasting outlook from their producers, considering the performances on *Eat Bulaga!* to be “harmless spoofing”, but parodies nonetheless, as Joey de Leon put it. Jimmy Santos, who has been a host since 1981, said that he understands why some people may interpret the segments as encouraging of the derision of performers and songs: “But it's not done in a negative way — it's just the show's sense of humour” (personal communication, 15 August 2016). Vic Sotto also referred to the performances as “spoofs” but clarified that the show does not intentionally put anyone on stage to ridicule them. He said, “What you have to understand is that everybody is ‘in’ on the joke — the contestants, the viewers watching — they know this is for entertainment's sake. I've always believed that with everything in showbiz, it's not personal, it's entertainment” (personal communication, 17 August 2016). To reiterate an earlier point, claims of “all in good fun and entertainment” to explain *Eat Bulaga!*'s culture of mockery

can be conveniently made when these producers and presenters have continued to profit handsomely from the show's success and popularity with audiences and advertisers. The assertion that the performers willingly participated in the show's culture of lampooning also exemplifies a mainstream media system whereby individuals or groups have been inclined to do whatever it takes, such as the ridiculing of one's self and others, to achieve stardom.

It is worth noting that *Eat Bulaga's* brand of musical culture during the 1990s was not entirely focused on mockery. A popular segment that ran from 1994 until 1999 (then revived in 2009) was *Birit Baby*, featuring child singers who sung powerful runs popularised by the likes of the American pop stars Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston. The programme promoted this type of musical singing that involved the sustaining of high notes, usually by female performers. While birit performances do not entail the outright ridiculing of the contestants, their deliberately exaggerated style of singing can be considered as a form of dramatic parody.

The winner of the *Birit Baby* competition in 1998 was 11-year-old Rachelle Ann Go, who performed both Dion's "All By Myself" and the *Les Misérables* anthem "I Dreamed A Dream" during the final. Unlike the programme's other singing contests, *Birit Baby* was not meant to elicit laughter from audiences but rather to entertain them with the children's talents. The child performers were not required to impersonate an original artist's singing voice or appearance. Go appeared to have topped the competition through sheer vocal ability. She later won another reality singing programme, *Search for A Star*, in 2004, which catapulted her into fame. She has since released multiple best-selling albums, appeared as an actress on Philippine television and theatre, and in 2015 was cast to play the role of Fantine in the West End revival of *Les Misérables*, performing "I Dreamed A Dream" to audiences in London. In an email conversation, Go said that a

valuable lesson she learned from her appearance on *Eat Bulaga!* was keeping the sustained attention of an audience throughout a performance:

“*Eat Bulaga!* has a live audience and because the studio was not as big then as it is now, you could clearly see the people’s reactions to your performances. You can really sense if they’re happy with you or if they’re getting bored. The show’s staff would always tell me that if they start looking bored, just sing higher notes because that will wake them up! (...) That’s the best thing I’ve learned from *Birit Baby*: how to be a showman and how to make audiences happy. I’ll forever be grateful to *Eat Bulaga!* for starting my career” (personal communication, 17 September 2016).

The performances on *Birit Baby* called attention to the extraordinary ability of its young contestants to emulate the dynamic singing of international pop music divas. For the viewers, the source of entertainment was precisely the children’s remarkable aptitude; that “wow” moment when the little performers would open their mouths and produce inconceivable voices. The fact that their performances deviated from the expected turned them into figures of fascination and entertainment for the audience.

The musical examples discussed in this section — namely the programme’s segments *Bulagaan*, *Ikaw at Echo*, *Doble Kara*, *Gaya-Gaya*, *Puto Maya*, and *Birit Baby* — embodied the kind of kitsch musical entertainment that the show pioneered throughout the 1990s. This style emphasised peculiar musical performances that often involved parody and caricature, with the amusement and laughter of the audience as their primary goal. In turn, the public delighted in the programme’s novel type of entertainment, turning it into the most-watched show on Philippine television in the 1990s. *Eat Bulaga!* thus em-

bodied kitsch for the Filipino audience during the decade. Conversely, the kitsch established *Eat Bulaga!* as a significant and influential figure in the country's popular culture.

We can further theorise the programme's lowbrow style as a form of subversion, in the sense that its unexpected foregrounding of musical parody and mockery defied imposed standards and established expectations of what counted as mass culture in the Philippines during that time. Due to its popularity with the masses, the show served as the voice of the lower-class majority who was both recovering from a sombre political period and yearning for cultural products that diverted and amused their sensibilities. The spectacles of *Eat Bulaga!*, which became the foundation of the New Manila Sound scene, served as a platform that featured the performance and expression of the audience's identities and yearnings. It was a gesture that no mass, commercial product had ever enacted, given the entertainment industry's focus on severely serious and political content, or outright works that mimicked their Western counterparts.

This consideration of the programme's aptitude in quickly attracting such a massive base from the 1990s and onwards — it was and continues to be the most popular television show in the Philippines — echoes Michael Bristol's work on the nature and purpose of the carnival as a social institution. The characteristic media frenzies of a musical variety programme, after all, evoke the expressive attributes of the carnival, whose spectacles were geared towards the enjoyment of a mass audience.⁴¹ “Comic vitality, the grotesque, the irrational, the carnivalesque, and orderly disorder have a liberating potential,” Bristol wrote (1985, 27). Correspondingly, *Eat Bulaga!*'s unconventional spectacles fostered a festive atmosphere that offered the masses transitory assurances of cultural and social authority. The programme's comic pageantry — which have often come across

⁴¹ These carnival features include “masquerades that take the form of travesty and misinterpretation, stylised conflict and agonistic misrule, and utopian imagery of unlimited material abundance and social peace” (Bristol 1985, 52).

as ridiculous and incoherent — yielded laughter and derision, which are intrinsic elements that are at the core of carnivalesque performances. Reflecting on the ability of carnivals to manifest the desires of the public, Bristol further wrote, “Carnival suggests the joyful affirmation of becoming. It is ecstatic collectivity” (1985, 48). In a similar fashion, *Eat Bulaga!* affected a large community of viewers in a reasonably short time in the 1990s, eventually becoming the preferred form of entertainment for the common people. Through *Eat Bulaga!*’s iconic status and sensational success, mass culture became the country’s national culture, a matter further examined in the succeeding sections.

Influence on popular culture

Considering the number of musical variety programmes that *Eat Bulaga!* influenced from the 1990s onwards, the show effectively started a trend on Philippine television. But its impact extended to other genres of works belonging to the country’s entertainment industry. The films produced during the 1990s, for instance, mirrored *Eat Bulaga!*’s offbeat comedy style — a sharp contrast to the serious dramas and action thrillers that dominated the local film industry during the 1980s and early 1990s. Most of these movies, particularly the romantic comedies, even featured song-and-dance sequences.⁴² These slapstick features continue to be the most popular genre in the Philippine film industry today,

⁴² Examples of the most popular Filipino films from the 1990s that featured such song-and-dance sequences are: *Andrew Ford Medina: Wag Kang Gamol!* (Don’t Be Bad), 1991; *Alabang Girls*, 1992; *Ano Ba ‘Yan?* (What’s Up With That?), 1992; *Greggy en Boggie*, 1994; *Hindi Pa Tapos Ang Labada, Darling* (The Laundry Isn’t Finished, Darling), 1994; *Enteng en Mokong: Kaming Mga Mababaw ang Kaligayahan* (We Who Are Easily Satisfied), 1997; *Ang Pinakamababang Baba sa Balat ng Lupa* (The Longest Chin in the World), 1997; *Publik Enemy 1 n 2: Aksidental Heroes*, 1997; *Habababa-doo! Puti-puti-poo!*, 1998; and *Isprikitik: Walastik Kung Pumitik* (Expert Snapper), 1999.

delighting viewers with their diverting plots.⁴³ While there is no absolute confirmation these films (listed on the footnote below and on Appendix C, page 249) considered *Eat Bulaga!* as their direct root influence, I assert that their foregrounding of physical comedy and humorous musical numbers had no other precedent in the country's entertainment industry save for *Eat Bulaga!*. The fact that many of these films starred the main presenters of the show (such as Tito, Vic, and Joey), as well as celebrities who found their start on the programme's segments, also strengthens their link to *Eat Bulaga!*.



Figure 9. The SexBomb Girls during the 3 February 2002 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Antonio Tuviera.

The programme also influenced the local music industry: aside from Aegis's career, of course, the mid-1990s saw the rise of “novelty songs”, a genre of eccentric music that parodied Western pop music and often featured nonsensical lines, catchy puns, and

⁴³ For a selection of Filipino films since the 1990s that mirrored *Eat Bulaga!*'s offbeat comedy style, see Appendix C on page 249.

double entendres. Recorded and produced as singles and albums, these songs were performed principally for their comical effect, intending to amuse listeners. Among the most popular novelty acts during the 1990s were the rapper Andrew E, the pop-rock band Parokya ni Edgar (Edgar’s Parish), and The SexBomb Girls, a racy all-female singing and dancing group that started as background performers on *Eat Bulaga!*’s segments and sketches in 1999.⁴⁴ The SexBomb Girls became known for their risqué lyrics and dance moves, which they performed while dressed in revealing, identical attire (as seen in fig. 9). Their most popular hit “Spaghetti Song”, a slight parody of the Welsh singer Tom Jones’s “Sex Bomb” (2000), featured presenter Joey de Leon rapping throughout the track. The SexBomb Girls debuted the song on *Eat Bulaga!* on 3 February 2002, a performance that catapulted them into fame and turned the track into a musical hit that was constantly played on the radio and performed on television.

“Spaghetti Song”

The SexBomb Girls (*Round 2*, 2003)

Composer and Lyricist: Lito Camo

JOEY DE LEON:

O ano mga darling, ready na ba kayo?

Darlings, are you ready?

O sige, simulan na natin ba?

All right, shall we begin?

Okay, 5, 6, 7, 8!

Okay, 5, 6, 7, 8!

SEXBOMB GIRLS:

⁴⁴ For a selection of Filipino novelty singers and groups from the 1990s and onwards that have mirrored or adapted the aesthetics and performative styles developed by the New Manila Sound, see Appendix D on page 256.

JOEY DE LEON:

O sabay sabay!

All together now!

SEXBOMB GIRLS:

Spaghetting pababa, pababa nang pababa

Spaghetti goes low, lower and lower

Spaghetting pataas, pataas nang pataas

Spaghetti goes high, higher and higher

Spaghetting pababa, pababa nang pababa

Spaghetti goes low, lower and lower

Spaghetting pataas, spaghetting bababa

Spaghetti goes high, higher and higher

At pataas! Aw! Making kayo...

And higher! Aw! Listen up...

JOEY DE LEON:

Ayokong pumayat, ayokong tumaba

I don't want to get thin or to get fat

Ayoko ring matulad sa isang dambuhala

I also don't want to look like a whale

Ayoko sa labat yung buto't balat

Most of all, I don't want to look skeletal

Ayoko ring tawagin na tabachoy at payat

I don't want to be called fatty or skinny

Gusto ni Tsupot ay sexy, sexy, sexy

What 'Tsupot likes is sexy, sexy, sexy

Kaya mag-exercise ang aking masasabi

So go and exercise is all I say

The lyrics of the song embodied the brand of absurd humour and bizarre content that *Eat Bulaga!* popularised. It manifested the powerful influence the programme had on the cultural products that emerged from the 1990s and beyond, which all contributed to a reshaping of the content, tone, and style that characterised the country's culture and entertainment industry: a turn from the satirical, reactionary, and politically-tinged films, programmes, and music of the 1970s and 1980s towards the humorous, diverting, and unsophisticated works of the 1990s. *Eat Bulaga!* can thus be considered not only the

most-watched programme in the Philippines during that decade, but also the leading proponent of a distinct musical culture that had never before existed in the country. In 2013, *Eat Bulaga!* even made a direct venture into the music industry, recording and producing a compilation album titled *Eat Bulaga Dabarkads D' Album (A Party for Every Juan!)*, containing eight original novelty songs popularised on the programme. The album went platinum after three weeks, proof of both the show's viability and marketability as a cultural product and its remarkable appeal to a mass audience.

Producer Antonio Tuviera explained:

“We were able to tap into something inside the viewers that other shows could not. What is it? I don't know myself because it's so hard to put that into words. The way the public responded to our show was — it was magical — it really was. Okay, maybe it's our ability to read the mood of the masses. Because we decided during that time, okay, you know what, we're going to start making our show for the masses, for the poor, for the ordinary Filipino — they are the majority in our country anyway, right? So let's just work for them and entertain them the best way we can. Let's give them what they want, which was something a lot of the other programmes didn't really understand” (personal communication, 15 August 2016).

Tuviera's statement implies that the seeming lack of thoughtful purpose of most of the show's segments and performances — the variety of television it presented — was precisely what the audiences yearned for. He acknowledged that the programme was devised for the consumption of “the masses, the poor, the ordinary Filipino” and not for the minority elites and educated, a class that generally shunned *Eat Bulaga!* as crude and un-

cultured. Tuviera's assertion can be read as ostensibly democratic, but it might also be interpreted as rather condescending. He suggests that the lower classes have solicited mindless musical entertainment, as dictated by their collective taste and preference, and Tuviera's positive enterprise has simply satiated their need.

Since the 1990s, *Eat Bulaga!* has also become a platform for the building and promotion of celebrities in the country. Many of the presenters on *Eat Bulaga!* became popular public figures who utilised their stardom on the show to pursue other television, film, or music ventures. Lead hosts Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, and Joey de Leon became national celebrities, appearing in over 50 blockbuster comedy films from 1990 to 1999 — most of which featured musical numbers — as well as securing lucrative advertising endorsement deals for everything from clothing brands and grooming products to home appliances and fast-food restaurants. They also went on to star in over 60 different television programmes, primarily sitcoms and gag shows, while still keeping their presenting jobs on *Eat Bulaga!*.⁴⁵

Tito Sotto even parlayed his fame into a political career, ambitiously running for the Philippine Senate in 1992. Astonishingly, he won a Senate seat, topping the tally among all 164 candidates.⁴⁶ Sotto has been widely credited for launching the trend of celebrities running for national posts in the Philippines, with stars exploiting their fame acquired from the entertainment industry to be elected into office regardless of their lim-

⁴⁵ From 2000 to 2018, Vic Sotto starred in 25 feature films and 20 other television programmes aside from *Eat Bulaga!*; while Joey de Leon starred in 14 films and 39 television programmes. After his election to the Philippine Senate, Tito Sotto limited his appearances on television, save for *Eat Bulaga!*, which he continues to host until the present-day, and a public service programme titled *Brigada Siete*, where he appeared from 1994 to 2001.

⁴⁶ In the Philippines, senators are elected nationally by the entire electorate every three years. The 12 candidates who garner the highest votes serve a six-year term.

ited credentials in governance (*Associated Press* 2013; *The Economist* 2007). Sotto also went on to win Senate terms in the 1998, 2010, and the most recent 2016 elections. On May of 2018, Sotto was elected as Senate President, the third highest and most powerful position in the Philippine government. Throughout all of Sotto's election campaigns, he was endorsed and promoted by his co-presenters on *Eat Bulaga!*, who sung and danced in campaign stages across the country for his election; *Eat Bulaga!*'s theme song was often played as the anthem of his bids.

In an interview, Sotto — who is affectionally called by fans as “Tito Sen”, as in “senator” — acknowledged the significance of *Eat Bulaga!* to his political career:

“I know for a fact that I would not have been elected in 1992 — finishing first place in the ballots — if not for my status as a host and actor on *Eat Bulaga!* (...) The whole country knew who I was because they were all watching our show. (...) Of course, since then, I have proven to our countrymen that I am a competent public servant and that is why they have re-elected me back to the Senate. But yes, I do believe that without *Eat Bulaga!*, there would be no Senator Sotto, ‘Tito Sen’, today” (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

Sotto's political success underscores the power of democratic opinion and taste in the country, irrespective of whether other members of the population may find it grating for public servants to dovetail with media celebrity culture. Moreover, the substantial number of celebrities who found fame on *Eat Bulaga!* attests to the programme's hold over its audience. They are evidence of the show's ability to create compelling characters and narratives, which are packaged as entertainment and then served to the viewers. That one

of the show's main presenters was elected multiple times to a national government post testifies to the programme's capability to turn its stars into figures of trust and authority. Producer Antonio Tuviera claimed that the celebrities that *Eat Bulaga!* have created throughout its four-decade run are proof of the programme's influence to the country's popular culture, saying: "When you look at the country's biggest names right now, you see that a lot of them started on the show. That just tells you how much the public loves us and trusts us and believes in us and what we put out there" (personal communication, 15 August 2016).⁴⁷ Loyalty on the part of the audience has indeed played an important role in the show's continued success. Such devotion has been fostered during the last three decades through an unrelenting delivery of the programme's brand of entertainment which fans have grown devoted to. In turn, these viewers keep watching, turning *Eat Bulaga!* into a sustainable cultural and business empire.

Aside from impacting the identities of audiences, the explosion of talent contests and musical variety programmes on Philippine television was one of *Eat Bulaga!*'s most significant legacies, turning this genre of song-and-dance entertainment into a phenomenon. From the 1990s onwards, several variety shows were produced by rival televi-

⁴⁷ Since its premiere in 1979, *Eat Bulaga!* has featured a revolving cast of close to 200 presenters, including the current group of 20 hosts, led by the trio of Tito, Vic, and Joey. Most of the show's past presenters have gone on to become popular celebrities in the entertainment industry, including: comic Ai-Ai delas Alas (1995-97, 2015); musician Aiza Seguerra (1987-97); television executive Charo Santos (1986-87); singer Donna Cruz (1995-98); hip-hop icon Francis Magalona (1998-2009); talk show host Kris Aquino (1988-89); film superstar Maricel Soriano (1985-87, 1995-96); radio presenter Mr. Fu (2008-11); and Sharon Cuneta (1983-84), who is considered by many as the country's biggest star. Aside from Tito Sotto, several also went on to pursue careers in politics, including Herbert Bautista (1989-92), the mayor of Quezon City, and Lani Mercado (1989-90), the former congresswoman and now mayor of Bacoor.

sion stations to compete against *Eat Bulaga!* and its domination of viewers during the noontime slot. After *Student Canteen* was cancelled in 1986, it was replaced by *Lunch Date*, which featured segments such as *Modus Operandi*, a comedy sketch segment similar to *Bulagaan*, and talent contests such as *Bonggang Beautician* (Fabulous Beautician), a talent and beauty competition for homosexual hairdressers, and *Mutya ng Palengke* (The Muse of the Market), a talent contest for women working as market vendors. Through such types of segments, these new programmes emulated *Eat Bulaga!*'s brand of slapstick humour, attempting to replicate its success with the public.

But unsuccessful in dethroning *Eat Bulaga!* and its status as the most-watched programme on television, *Lunch Date* was reformatted to become a new variety show, titled *SST: Salo-Salo Together* (Let's Eat Together), in 1993. *SST* not only adapted *Eat Bulaga!*'s penchant for kitschy musical segments and comedy sketches, the show even assembled their own version of the popular trio of Tito, Vic, and Joey. The producers hired young comics Smokey Manaloto, Dennis Padilla, and Randy Santiago as the main presenters and performers of *SST*, backed by female co-hosts Anjanette Abayari, Ai-Ai delas Alas, Liezl Martinez, and Giselle Sanchez.

The programme's main segments were clearly inspired by those of *Eat Bulaga!*: they include *Knock Knock Hello!*, a contest for home viewers; *Sari-Sari Stories* (Various Stories), a sketch segment where the show's hosts spoof famous films and musicians; and several talent competitions such as *Rainbow Princess* and *SST Dream Girl*. In 1995, *SST*'s home station, GMA Network, presented to the producers and presenters of *Eat Bulaga!* an opportunity to leave their current network ABS-CBN and move to GMA, offering the production a more lucrative contract. *Eat Bulaga!* agreed, prompting GMA to eventually cancel *SST*, whose noontime slot was given to *Eat Bulaga!*, the rival it failed to overthrow.

After *Eat Bulaga!* left their station in 1995, ABS-CBN created a replacement variety programme, *'Sang Linggo nAPO Sila* (They're Here All Week), hosted by the pop music trio APO Hiking Society, comprised of Buboy Garovillo, Danny Javier, and Jim Paredes. The show was cancelled in 1998, with one newspaper critic blaming its focus on sketches and musical performances that often expressed satirical and political undertones: "The ambitious humour of *'Sang Linggo nAPO Sila* and its hosts was too intelligent for the average Pinoy. Their tone of subtle sarcasm and chastisement of the government proved to be too much for the masses who were simply hungry for simple laughs while partaking of their lunch meal" (Martirez 1995).⁴⁸ This observation attested to the extraordinary command of *Eat Bulaga!*'s brand of lowbrow humour and its hold over the Filipino audience during that decade. Viewers were so beguiled by the programme's lowbrow form of entertainment that they rejected the political satire that was once the popular comic tradition during the 1970s and 80s.

Keen to return to the proven format and tone of *Eat Bulaga!*, ABS-CBN created a new variety programme titled *MTB: Magandang Tanghali Bayan* (Good Afternoon, Nation), hosted by John Estrada, Randy Santiago, and Willie Revillame, a trio of film and television comics who were known for their risqué humour. The show also featured Christine Jacob, one of the original presenters of *Eat Bulaga!*. For several months in 1999 and 2000, *MTB* actually managed to surpass *Eat Bulaga!* in the ratings game, owing to *MTB*'s popular segment *Pera o Bayong* (Cash or Basket), a game of chance and trivia interspersed with musical numbers from the show's in-house group of female dancers. But *Eat Bulaga!* regained its standing when it created its own version of *Pera o Bayong*: a segment called *Meron o Wala* (Something or Nothing). *Magandang Tanghali Bayan* was eventually cancelled in 2003.

⁴⁸ Newspaper clipping accessed at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

Eat Bulaga! remained strong with viewers throughout the the 2000s. Rival variety programmes came and went — including *Masayang Tanghali Bayan* (Happy Afternoon, Nation) from 2003 to 2004, *MTB Ang Saya Saya* (MTB We’re So Happy) from 2004 to 2005, *Wowowee* from 2005 to 2010, *Pilipinas Win Na Win* in 2010, *Wil Time Bigtime* (named after host Willie Revillame) from 2010 to 2013, *Happy, Yipee, Yehey* from 2011 to 2012, and *Wowonillie* in 2013. They followed *Eat Bulaga!*’s combination of sketches, musical numbers, and talent contests; moreover, they all featured an opening musical theme. *Eat Bulaga!* can also be credited for inspiring the creation of a category of television programmes in the Philippines: the musical concert show, which exclusively features song-and-dance performances by popular actors and musicians. These concert shows are broadcast every Sunday noon, the only day when *Eat Bulaga!* does not air on television. Among the most popular are *ASAP*, which premiered in 1995 and continues to broadcast until today, *SOP*, which ran from 1997 to 2010, *Party Pilipinas* from 2010 to 2013, *P.O.5* from 2010 to 2011, *Sunday All Stars* from 2013 to 2015, and *Sunday PinaSaya* (A Happier Sunday) from 2015 to the present.⁴⁹ The enduring popularity of *Eat Bulaga!* — and the programmes that have emulated its styles and strategies — manifests the significant role that musical performance plays in Filipino culture and the local masses that continue to support it. It also illustrates how the television industry has capitalised on the programme’s success by producing newer versions of the original show, with the expectation that these replicates will captivate a mass audience, given the public’s proven support towards *Eat Bulaga!*. In this manner, *Eat Bulaga!* generated a scene — one marked by

⁴⁹ Information concerning these programmes taken from archival documents from the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines), in folders labelled “Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas — Television Networks and Shows (Local): Official List”; accessed at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library.

musical spectacle and comedy — that has significantly impacted the entertainment industry, Filipino popular culture, and the viewers that consume them.

Embraced by the lower classes

In this section, I continue my examination of the programme's impact by focusing specifically on its audience. To acquire a nuanced understanding of what it was like to be a viewer of *Eat Bulaga!* in the 1990s, I talked to a dozen individuals based in Manila who were avid fans of the show during that decade. My examination is structured on a typology of relationships between audiences and stars proposed by the sociologist Andrew Tudor in his book *Image and Influence*. Tudor suggested that there are four categories of relationships that emerge between fans and stars, which in this case are *Eat Bulaga!* and its ensemble of presenters and performers. These categories are as follows: emotional affinity, whereby the audience feel a sense of involvement with the stars; self-identification, or how the audience place themselves in the personas of the stars; imitation, which occurs when the stars become a model for the audience; and projection, with the audience dealing with their realities in terms of how the stars deal with theirs (1974, 80-83). This four-part typology is useful in understanding the select cases of four viewers below.

Emotional affinity: For Mary Jane, a 37-year-old housewife who I met during a live taping of *Eat Bulaga!*, her enduring attraction to the show has been kindled by a fascination with celebrities. As she told me: “I come here for the stars.” Her affinity towards the show is based on an emotional attachment towards the show's presenters, a devotion that has been strengthened through the years. Mary Jane has watched the show live more than 20 times since 1995, when *Eat Bulaga!* once again switched television networks, from ABS-CBN to GMA, which transferred the show's live production to Broadway Centrum, a GMA-affiliated television studio complex located in the district of New

Manila. That new studio was well situated to Mary Jane's home during the 1990s, so it was convenient for her to travel to Broadway Centrum to watch the live shows. She said she takes pleasure in the atmosphere of *Eat Bulaga!*'s production: "You get to see how the show is created and you get to meet so many people, like the other fans in here. Of course the best part is seeing my favourite idols in person and meeting them in between commercial breaks or after the show. It's really very exciting to be here."

Notably, Mary Jane considers the show's stars as figures to be revered, evident in her tantalised expressions and audible shrieks while watching the live show. She said: "I already get star-struck whenever I see my beautiful idols on TV when I'm at home — what more when they're right here in front of me? I always feel like I will faint because of excitement. I love them, I really adore them — and I come here to thank them for the joy that they bring to me and millions of other viewers" (personal communication, 1 September 2016). That she considers it a privilege to be able to watch the show's stars in person, and is compelled to express her gratitude to them, manifests the phenomenal impact of the programme to its fans. In stating that the variety show delights herself "and millions of other viewers", moreover, Mary Jane identifies that she belongs to a larger community of fans who share a similar fascination for the show.

Self-identification: Jocelyn, a 43-year-old housewife, remembers watching the show daily from a small television set inside the *carinderia* (eatery) she used to work for as a cook and server.⁵⁰ She recalls how she, her co-workers, and their customers would watch with rapt attention whenever *Eat Bulaga!* would go on the air. She said: "There was nothing like it on TV. Everyone in the carinderia would be silent because we're all busy watching. It was just really fun to watch. The trio of TVJ [a common acronym used to

⁵⁰ The *carinderia* is a Filipino term for food stalls serving low-priced, home-cooked food and frequented by mostly blue-collar workers and students.

refer to presenters Tito, Vic, and Joey] looked and talked like ordinary people, like everyone's mischievous cousins or uncles." Jocelyn's statement suggests that the programme's brand of unpretentious entertainment — from the accessible comic humour to the ordinary attire of the performers — portrayed the show's stars as relatable, allowing viewers to identify themselves with the celebrities on their television screen.

Jocelyn has remained a fan of the programme throughout all these years; I also met her while watching a live episode on the set of *Eat Bulaga!*. She was on the audience area along with her 15-year-old daughter and 38-year-old cousin. It was her fourth time watching the show in person, while it was a first for her daughter and cousin — a demonstration of how a fan's enthusiasm and support were being passed on to a younger generation. Jocelyn said, "We were very lucky — we just lined up outside at nine in the morning and I thought we wouldn't be able to get a seat because there were already hundreds in line, but we managed to get in. We really wanted to be here because everyone at *Eat Bulaga!*, TVJ, and the other hosts — they already feel like family to us" (personal communication, 19 August 2016). Watching *Eat Bulaga!* daily for close to three decades, Jocelyn has developed a close attachment to the show, with her devotion to the programme increasing as the years go by. That she regards the presenters as family attests to the show's capability not only to encourage viewers to identify with its stars, but also to forge deep connections between them.

Imitation: Ray, a 56-year-old handyman and carpenter who has worked since 1997 in the television studio where *Eat Bulaga!* is filmed, has remained a fan of the show's three main presenters after all these years. He said that they have become a role model for him, influencing even his approach to life: "Day after day, whether or not they're feeling good or are encountering problems in their personal lives, the hosts come out on stage with big smiles. Everybody is happy and satisfied, whether the camera is

rolling or not. Their happiness is genuine and infectious to everyone. I try to live my life like that, by focusing on the good things around me.” In Ray’s case, the show’s presenters have become not only revered celebrity figures: they have also turned into role models by which Ray mimics his own identity.

In the past, Ray has taken his wife and five children several times into the studio to watch the show’s live taping and then to meet the presenters backstage. “They are good role models for my children. These people work so hard — and all to bring joy to us.” Ray also appreciates how the show brings families, like his own, together: “You go to any house in the Philippines on a Saturday at 12 o’clock — trust me, they’re all watching *Eat Bulaga!* while eating lunch together” (personal communication, 1 September 2016). It is noteworthy that Ray considers the show’s stars as role models whose gleeful disposition are worth emulating, heedless that such cheerfulness has often been rooted in the programme’s culture of mockery and derision of its performers. In fact, among the viewers I talked to, including the four mentioned above, none of them considered the performances on the programme as hurtful lampooning or negative caricature. As Mary Jane asserted, “It’s all for fun. I don’t take anything on the show seriously. Negativity is not what *Eat Bulaga!* is about.” Such a view reflected those of the show’s producers and presenters, who insisted that the performances were all done in the name of a type of entertainment that may be playful, but remained inoffensive.

Projection: The programme was also watched regularly during the early 1990s by Paulino, a 49-year-old taxi driver who says *Eat Bulaga!*’s humorous segments were a welcome respite from the dark years of Martial Law. The show brought lightheartedness and good spirits to a country still mending the physical and emotional wounds caused by the dictatorship, he said: “Everything on TV was serious back then — in the 60s, 70s, 80s — but *Eat Bulaga!* was different because it never mentioned the government. It was as if it

had its own ‘world’ that was always positive. Of course everybody wanted to be part of that world — who wouldn’t? (...) Everybody was just singing and having fun — they were just pulling pranks” (personal communication, 21 September 2016). *Eat Bulaga!* was indeed so depoliticised and unconcerned with the state of the nation during that time that it can be regarded as a cultural product that existed in its world of merriment and musical pageantry. It presented a vision of a Philippines that was more optimistic than its actual conditions. The show allowed its audience to be transported, for three hours each day, to a place marked by comedic spectacle that was devoid of whatever troubles they faced in the real world. Raymond Durgnat wrote, “The stars are a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself” (1967, 137). *Eat Bulaga!*’s loyal viewers like Paulino indeed projected themselves onto the identities of their idols by adapting their exceedingly joyful disposition.

Backlash from the elites

Despite its success and popularity with the masses, *Eat Bulaga!* had its share of critics, particularly from individuals belonging in the educated elite class. In 1994, Marcelo Garcia, a former university professor and a member of the board of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the official and government-run arts council of the Philippines, was asked by a reporter of the daily broadsheet *Manila Standard* of his views on the country’s most-watched television programme. Garcia replied: “I don’t watch it — and neither should you and your readers.” Asked to elaborate on his criticism about *Eat Bulaga!*, Garcia did not mince his words: “It’s tasteless! No, it’s trash television! That show is offensive to the performers and offensive to the Filipino public who have

to be subjected to such idiotic ‘presentations’ [quotation marks on original article] done under the guise of entertainment” (Legaspi 1994).⁵¹

Garcia’s assessment of the programme reflected the sentiment of many individuals who belonged to the country’s upper classes of society during that time, according to Felipe de Leon Jr., a former chairman of the NCCA and the son of the late Felipe Padilla de Leon, the aforementioned Martial Law-era composer: “I don’t think *Eat Bulaga!* back in the 1990s and 2000s was viewed with fondness as it is today by some people, especially by the so-called elites and also those who finished substantial education,” he said in an interview. “I would actually agree with Marcelo and his blunt critique. Back then *Eat Bulaga!* was considered cheap, even tacky — and yes, even trashy TV” (personal communication, 21 September 2016). These types of criticism reinforce the cultural intimacy framework that I had earlier assigned in considering the programme’s significance to its audience. While many view the show as a vehicle for social collectivity, there are others like Garcia and de Leon who consider the culture of *Eat Bulaga!* as a source of embarrassment, deeming the show as a form of tasteless entertainment. Herzfeld contends that rueful self-recognition is a key marker of cultural intimacy. Indeed, while these critics recognise the popularity and influence of the programme and its stars, they dismiss the show’s significance to the country’s national culture.

As de Leon told me, the musical performances featured on the programme during that decade did not reflect and represent the culture of the country. He said, “Those mundane and trivial performances — the novelty songs of Tito, Vic, and Joey and their peers — that’s not Filipino music, that’s not what we’re about, I don’t think.” Asked what he believes comprised the musical culture of the Philippines during that time, de Leon replied: “Well, to me, the 1990s were all about the continuation of the flourishing of the

⁵¹ Newspaper clipping accessed at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Library.

nationalistic folk music from the 1980s. There were, of course, some amazing choral compositions being composed by our national artists such as Lucio San Pedro” (personal communication, 21 September 2016).

While de Leon is accurate in his claim that musicians who performed nationalistic and folk music existed during that decade — such as Freddie Aguilar, Joey Ayala, and Bayang Barrios, as did choral composers and performers like San Pedro, the Philippine Madrigal Singers, and of course his late father Felipe Padilla — they were a significant minority compared to the novelty acts, pop balladeers, and pop-rock bands that dominated the mainstream music industry in terms of popularity and exposure. As earlier noted, the performances of many of these folk and choral musicians were limited to the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, whose attendees comprised of those who could afford the costly ticket prices of the national arts venue — a matter of economic exclusion that prevented the lower classes from participating fully and equally in the cultural life of their country. De Leon’s appraisal thus implies a rejection of mainstream and popular media as valid forms of culture that represented the talents and tastes of Filipinos. His assertion manifests what members of the elite and educated class have often considered as the official musical culture of the Philippines such as folk and choral music from decades past, traditions they are proud to identify themselves with. Such elitist views constructed the programme’s brand of mass entertainment as an aberrant — and as a sort of illegitimate trend that did not fit into constricted notions of the composition of a national culture.

A similar point was brought up by Jigger Mejia, a former executive at Viva Records, the country's biggest recording label in the 1990s.⁵² Mejia said in an email conversation:

“Of course the NCCA is going to say that about *Eat Bulaga!* because these guys are forever in denial about the state of our country's culture! They think it's still all about the *katutubo* [tribal] music, the classical hymns, etcetera. I mean, do they seriously think that's what people these days are listening to? It's time for us to move on and accept the fact that ever since the late 80s, it's always been about pop music from the USA and Europe, or at least local pop music that sounded like pop music from the USA and Europe” (personal communication, 3 November 2016).

According to Mejia, *Eat Bulaga!* provided the “most important stage” for these pop artists: “The show gave them a platform. Without *Eat Bulaga!* during the 1990s and 2000s, our music industry will not be what it is today. Maybe there wouldn't be a music industry at all and we'd all have to just sit through NCCA's majestic choir performances.” Mejia's statement is an important demonstration that conservative and progressive perspectives concerning the value and influence of *Eat Bulaga!* have existed in conflict within industry insiders. His high regard for *Eat Bulaga!* positions the programme as a cultural product that changed not only the country's television landscape but also the music industry, as its brand of kitsch seeped into the sensibilities of the decade's pop artists and producers.

⁵² Viva Records produced many of the albums by pop musicians who found their start as performers on *Eat Bulaga!*, including Andrew E, Blakdyak, Ogie Alcasid, Pops Fernandez, and Sharon Cuneta.

Despite its status as the most-watched programme on Philippine television, *Eat Bulaga!* was often panned not only by critics and government officials, but also by ordinary audience members. In a letter to the editor of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in the newspaper's 23 June 1996 issue, a reader named Evangeline Argente inveighed against the dangers of variety programmes and comedy sitcoms on Philippine television. She specifically referenced *Eat Bulaga!*, writing:

I am outraged that my three children and others like them who are of a young age have nothing of good quality to watch on our local television stations. (...) Shows like *Eat Bulaga!* are harmful and toxic, especially to our youth, because they promote the idea that it's okay to make fun of people. They promote vulgarity in our society with their tasteless singing and dancing. (...) My sister-in-law was appalled when my 5-year-old nephew started humming and dancing along to a song he apparently heard on *Eat Bulaga!*, which their family's helper was watching while she was taking care of the poor child. As a mother and housewife, I am offended. I encourage other parents to speak up and demand the MTRCB [Movie and Television Review and Classification Board] to put these offensive shows off the air. Who watches them anyway? They should be replaced with new shows of educational value (Argente 1996).⁵³

Argente's chastisement implies that the values of the viewing public during that time were negatively affected by the tastelessness of programmes like *Eat Bulaga!*. It also suggests that these shows did not have an audience, and that viewers who did watch them

⁵³ Newspaper clipping accessed at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* library.

were unfairly subjected to the “vulgarity” shown by the programmes. Argente’s statement also demonstrates that audience perspectives were diverse, as one would expect: that the public’s support towards *Eat Bulaga!* was not all directed one-way, and not entirely confined to class divisions. But the economic data, in terms of viewer numbers, tells a different story that we cannot ignore: *Eat Bulaga!* was the most-watched, and probably most popular, television programme in the country from the 1990s onwards. Was the show’s massive viewership forced to watch the show despite knowing of its supposed hazards to audiences, particularly the young? It is probable that Argente and her household belonged to the higher classes of Philippine society and thus may not have been cognisant of the programme’s large viewership, particularly among the lower and middle classes. Or perhaps their household belonged to the middle classes but aspired towards upward social mobility and, in the process, shunned popular culture that would normally be associated with their own class position. In that case, Argente’s critique could also be read as a way of distancing herself from the social stigmatisation by the upper classes.

Nestor Torre, the veteran entertainment critic of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, thinks there are both truths and fallacies in Argente’s letter. He said in an email conversation:

“I agree that *Eat Bulaga!* and other comedic and musical shows like it have shown and continue to show performances and skits that may be offensive to the sensibilities of the audience, particularly a conservative, a religious society like ours. But are they harmful? Come on, I think that’s taking it too far. As they say, ‘that’s entertainment’. Parents can always turn off the TV at home if they wish and make their kids listen to Bach instead. Why should they be educational? That’s not the job of a variety show. Their job is to distract — and

on that front, they're a success" (personal communication, 7 September 2016).

Eat Bulaga! started out as an entertainment programme intended to amuse and divert viewers. Its success with audiences, particularly in the 1990s, was so pervasive that its culture based on mockery and derision permeated outside the entertainment industry and into the daily lives and values of its viewers. As a result, its influence over Filipino culture may have engendered fears and accusations that the show was offensive and harmful to viewers, especially those of a young age.

When I asked Tuviera what he considers the worst criticism the show has ever received, particularly during the 1990s, he said that it did not concern the show's supposed tastelessness or harmfulness to viewers. "The attacks that really get to me — and I know this is true for the other producers and hosts too — are the ones that say that *Eat Bulaga!* is just a copycat of shows from America and that we promote only American songs and culture. That we are not Pinoy and that we don't promote Pinoy music," Tuviera said. "I will never get that because it's just outright unfair, right? (...) It makes me think that these people who used to say that to us — some on TV, some outright on our faces, mind you — have never really seen our show, or that they have no real understanding of what Pinoy culture really is" (personal communication, 15 August 2016). Tuviera's frustration with that criticism is understandable, as *Eat Bulaga!* should not be viewed as simply a copycat of American variety programmes or reality talent shows. Because while the show may have been inspired by them, in the way that *Eat Bulaga!* has been influenced by the programming templates and presenting styles of several Western shows, it is not an outright duplicate.

Applying Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry that were discussed in the introductory chapter, the performances on *Eat Bulaga!*, such as the musical covers of foreign songs that dominate the programme, are syncretic or hybrid works that incorporate elements of the foreign and the local, "neither the one thing nor the other" (1994, 33). For example, in the case of the musical segment *Bulagaan*, pop songs were reworked to fit a riddle's punch line into the track's lyrics. The songs may have been foreign, but the knock-knock jokes often concerned references to local popular culture and were performed, obviously, by "local" singers. In the cases of the talent contest segments *Ikaw at Echo*, *Doble Kara*, and *Gaya-Gaya, Puto Maya*, contestants imitated the singing style, physical appearance, or movement of Western pop musicians, but their performances were not meant to be pure duplicates of the original artists and songs, but rather playful adaptations that could be interpreted as works of caricature that both desire and deride the original. The ability of these works to display and express hybrid identities can be attributed to music's potential to create sonic and social contact zones that "absorb and meld heterogeneous national, cultural, and historical styles and traditions across space and within place" (Kun 2005, 23).

Hybridity can also be regarded as a concept that defies the operations of essentialism. As literary scholar Lily Rose Roxas-Tope wrote, "Hybridity resists essentialism by recovering and reinscribing previously suppressed voices and by encouraging new and unlikely combinations of cultural forms" (1998, 212). In parodying foreign works — in altering them or breaking them down — the show's mass spectacles "disrupted the authority" and undermined the significance of the original artists and songs, to borrow a description that Bhabha employed to describe the consequences of the concept of mimicry (1994, 126). The performances affirm Bhabha's contention that no foreign concept remains the same when placed within the context of a local culture because it undergoes

processes of modification and transformation. Moreover, what Bhabha's notions imply is that in hybrid products, the local or foreign do not become absolute authorities that overpower the other. The local elements in the work do not simply "win" over the foreign ones, or vice-versa; they are, precisely, a hybrid.

There is another counter argument, however, that hybridity can actually lead to essentialism. In the creation of new hybrid forms, the "parent" cultures can themselves become sharply defined and essentialised. In the Filipino case, the parody of Western popular music is foregrounded as the primary aspect of a given performance, as opposed to a more nuanced appraisal of the overall musical and cultural significance of the performance. The hybrid attribute of these cultural products is clearly more complex and conflicted than a simple fusion of the local and foreign — of a type of "happy hybridity" (Lo 2000) that does not account for unequal power relations. Indeed, to apply the concept of hybridity to the case studies in this dissertation is not to deny the continued command of Western styles and works on Philippine culture. Rather, it emphasises how these local musical works have adapted, modulated, contorted, and indeed hybridised the foreign in order to create a distinct cultural product that had never before existed in the country.

We can thus view *Eat Bulaga!* — and the New Manila Sound scene it engendered — as cultural products and platforms that exist in a "third space", Bhabha's notion of a hybrid space where local and foreign concepts co-exist together (1994, 39). It is a space of difference, translation, and negotiation "in which authority and signs are not fixed but rather open to reading and rereading. (...) This is the discursive and temporal context where [Filipino] culture is finally located", as J. Neil Garcia contends in a recent book on contemporary Philippine literature (2014, 21). In this manner, *Eat Bulaga!*'s appropriation of Western concepts and styles — and their subsequent intermingling with local perfor-

mance aesthetics and sensibilities — generated the programme's most significant legacy to the entertainment industry and popular culture of the Philippines: it created a genre of hybrid musical performances and a unique brand of comedic entertainment that had never before existed until its emergence on the show's stage, and on the television screens of millions of Filipino audiences, during the 1990s.

Chapter Three

Eat Bulaga!’s Enduring Legacy

Online community-building

When I first came to watch a live filming of an episode of *Eat Bulaga!*, on one Saturday in August of 2016, I did what most fans had to do in order to secure a seat inside the studio: queue up for hours outside Broadway Centrum, the studio where the show is filmed, before the programme went on air at noon. I arrived at Broadway Centrum a few minutes past seven in the morning, but there had already been about 120 people ahead of me in the queue. At the very front of the line were Marinella and Shirley, two middle-aged sisters and market vendors who took an 11-hour bus ride from the northern Philippine province of Ilocos Norte to get to Manila. They had been waiting since three in the morning, sitting on foldable chairs they had brought along with them. Shirley said, “We wanted to be sure we could get the good front seats, so we could see the celebrities up-close and hopefully take pictures with them.” Marinella added: “If I can just get a selfie with Bossing [the nickname of presenter Vic Sotto], I’ll be satisfied” (personal communication, 13 August 2016).

As the hours passed, the queue grew longer and longer. There were people of all ages in the crowd, particularly children and teenagers accompanied by their parents. Some dozed off while sitting on the pavement. The queue was relatively hushed and inactive, until the car of presenter Joey de Leon drove past the crowd at around 10:00 am. De Leon, sitting on the back of the car, opened his window and waved to the onlookers.

He screamed: “I’ll see you all inside. Thank you very much for waiting patiently!” The crowd suddenly came alive, hooting and applauding loudly. Arthur, a 19-year-old student accompanied by six friends, exclaimed, “That’s Joey! Oh my God! I can’t believe that just happened.”

A member of the show’s security estimated the crowd at 11:00 am to be about 600- to 700-strong. Twenty minutes later, they began allowing people inside. Children below the age of seven were turned away as part of the rules of the production, while elderly people were pulled aside and checked by a medical team before being allowed in. A female security guard yelled repeatedly: “We would like to remind you that cellphones, food, or drinks are not allowed inside the studio and should be thrown away or surrendered to us for safekeeping.” Many people at the back of the queue were not permitted inside, as the studio can only accommodate 400 audience members.



Figure 10. A view of the audience area during the August 13, 2016 live episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph by author.

The scene inside the studio resembled a loud, festive gathering. While waiting for the start of the live broadcast, members of the production staff led the audience into multiple song-and-dance numbers (as seen in fig. 10) to stimulate our enthusiasm. I was assigned a seat on the front-right corner of the audience area, alongside about a dozen women wearing the same red-coloured t-shirt with the words “Dabarkads Nation 2016 — Malabon Chapter” emblazoned in front, along with *Eat Bulaga!*’s logo. “Dabarkads” is a term popularised by the show’s late presenter Francis Magalona in 2009 to describe the fanbase of *Eat Bulaga!*; it is a play on the Filipino slang word *barkada*, which refers to a group of close friends. Malabon refers to the city in Metro Manila where the women reside. During the commercial breaks that aired in between the segments of the three-hour show, I had the opportunity to meet many of the women, including Mercedes, a 42-year-old housewife who explained to me that they are a fan club that watches the show together at least once a week.

The club was founded two years ago on the internet, on a group page called “Dabarkads Nation” on the social media website Facebook.⁵⁴ The page currently has about 240,000 members. Mercedes sent out a message to the entire group asking if there were any fans from her home city of Malabon who wanted to get together. About 15 people responded, and they met up, started a club, and attended tapings of the show. Today, their group of devotees counts about 80 to 100 members, the majority of them women in their 30s and 40s. Their youngest member is aged 13, a daughter of a member, while their oldest is in her mid-60s. Mercedes explained that she did not intend for the club to be comprised mostly of women: “It just so happens that a lot of women stay or work from home, so they have the time to meet up, watch the show, chat regularly online,

⁵⁴ The “Dabarkads Nation” Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/701981156518387>.

make t-shirts, print all these signs, and cook food for the club compared to other people” (personal communication, 13 August 2016).

The fan club typically meets every Saturday for breakfast at a fast-food chain near Broadway Centrum; afterwards, they all walk together to fall in line outside the studio to watch a live taping. Some of them, particularly the housewives or those who are unemployed, occasionally come for weekday episodes. Mercedes said, “I love our little fan club because I’ve met so many friends through it — they’ve practically become an extended family (...) There’s really no other reason why we do this — it’s just fun and we make ourselves happy together by watching the show” (personal communication, 13 August 2016). For audience members like Mercedes, the programme has allowed them to build a community and establish bonds with each other based on a shared identity as fans of the show. For others, the show has provided not just entertainment, but also a major form of diversion. Lily, a 51-year-old mother-of-two who I also met that day, said that when her husband passed in 2015, her son suggested that she join the club in order to meet new friends: “The club helped me get through depression. I’ve always been a viewer of *Eat Bulaga!* but to get to watch it live, to be here in person, and to be here with my friends, it’s something else that I can’t explain” (personal communication, 13 August 2016). This statement echoes an earlier point concerning the programme’s function both as a way of community building and as a form of escapist enterprise for viewers, with the show’s spectacle diverting their attention from their individual and collective realities.

While the club members still actively participate in discussions on the “Dabarkads Nation” group page on Facebook, they communicate primarily through a private message thread on Facebook. After our second meeting, Mercedes agreed to add me on the group thread, allowing me access to their conversations. The thread includes 23 women who are considered as the club’s most active members. Its purpose is mainly

for planning out details concerning what they call their “EBs” (which stand for “eye-balls” or meet-ups, but also a reference to *Eat Bulaga!*), such as dates, timings, locations, or the colour of the t-shirts they would have to wear at their meetings. Occasionally there would be personal messages such as birthday greetings or checking in on another member’s sick relative. Whenever the details of an “EB” are ironed out and organised, an announcement will then be posted on the “Dabarkads Nation” group page to invite other members to participate if they wish. On the “Dabarkads Nation” page, a description of the club, written by an anonymous moderator, reads:

“Welcome to our Dabarkads group, open 24/7! This is the only official group made for all of us die-hard fans who love and support *Eat Bulaga!*. This group was made for our Dabarkads who like sharing good vibes and positive thoughts about *Eat Bulaga!*. You are free to start a topic or give an opinion about *EB* or *EB* hosts. Love and respect your fellow Dabarkads in this group. For members who plan to meet up for a live viewing in *EB*’s studio, talk to each other first on a private message before you post your plans here. A reminder that Tape Inc. or *Eat Bulaga!* do not run this page. Finally, remember that wherever you are around the world, as long as you are happy and you enjoy the show, that’s what’s important — you are a Dabarkads! One love, good vibes!”⁵⁵

The internet has certainly contributed to the enduring popularity of *Eat Bulaga!* in recent years, allowing audiences to congregate together and experience their shared fandom for the programme online, such as on the platform provided by the “Dabarkads Nation”

⁵⁵ Translated by author from the original Taglish version.

page. They have utilised social media websites, primarily Facebook, to forge a sense of community among them even when the show goes off the air. On several group pages like “Dabarkads Nation”, fans are able to form and join both large-sized clubs and small sub-groups. They engage in conversations about the show — and upload, share, and comment on images and video clips related to the programme. Notably, YouTube has served as a repository of material from *Eat Bulaga!*, with ordinary audience members serving as unofficial archivists who record and upload clips from the show on the internet.⁵⁶ While uploading recordings of a television show infringes on the programme’s copyright and is prohibited by YouTube, there are still thousands of videos from *Eat Bulaga!* that remain posted on the website. The show’s producers explained that because they cannot possibly monitor and police all these postings, they simply turn a blind eye. As Poochie Rivera, one of *Eat Bulaga!*’s directors, told me in an interview: “These posts and videos online — all these recordings from our show by our fans — are something we’re aware of, but of course we do not have the time and cannot possibly click and report on every single video for violation” (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

These aforementioned digital undertakings, and other related anecdotes in this section, exemplify a type of online participatory culture that the internet has engendered for *Eat Bulaga!* and its audience. Building communities and archiving video clips, for instance, both illustrate the capability of the web to provide convenient platforms for the circulation of material, the exchange of sentiments and ideas, and even the performance of individual and collective identities in a networked public sphere. Kiri Miller, exploring play, performance, and participatory culture in the digital age, writes that social media can link the visceral and virtual experiences of users and viewers from diverse and dispersed

⁵⁶ See the collection *Digital Anthropology* (2012), edited by Heather Horst and Daniel Miller, which explore the impact of digital platforms such as Facebook, Second Life, and Google Earth on users and their everyday life.

locations (2012, 17). Websites such as YouTube and Facebook that host streaming videos and built-in social networking features have not only fostered virtual communities but also compelled cultural products such as *Eat Bulaga!* to create and maintain an active on-line presence. This has allowed the programme to both bolster their relationship with fans and reach new viewers.⁵⁷

On Facebook, a search of community pages related to *Eat Bulaga!* yielded hundreds of accounts like one simply called “*Eat Bulaga!*” (over 490,000 members), “*Eat Bulaga!’s Solid Dabarkads*” (over 322,000 members), and “Dabarkads Republic” (over 114,000 members); the word “Dabarkads” clearly has been an effective label that fans have employed to identify themselves as a united community of supporters. The main online venue for supporters of *Eat Bulaga!*, however, is the show’s official Facebook page, run by members of the programme’s production team.⁵⁸ It has a staggering following of about 15 million people, the largest online fanbase for any Filipino television show on Facebook; it is also the fifth most-liked Facebook page in the Philippines, surpassed only by the official pages of the media corporations ABS-CBN and GMA, and the celebrities Marian Rivera and Angel Locsin.⁵⁹ The page features images and videos uploaded daily

⁵⁷ See also the concept of parasocial interaction, which examines the illusionary and mediated experiences of audiences interacting with celebrities and social media characters as if they are engaged in a reciprocal relationship with them (Labrecque & Yuksel 2016; Yuksel 2014; Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh 2012; and Thorson & Rodgers 2006).

⁵⁸ The official *Eat Bulaga!* Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/EBdabarkads>.

⁵⁹ On Twitter, which is a less popular social media website in the Philippines compared to Facebook, *Eat Bulaga!* also commands the largest following among all local television programmes, with over 3.5 million followers. The show’s official Twitter feed can be accessed at <https://twitter.com/EatBulaga>.

and immediately after they air on television, allowing audiences to continue their consumption of the show beyond a live broadcast. *Eat Bulaga!*'s official Facebook page also organises online contests for fans, typically trivia related to the show and its presenters, with cash prizes or *Eat Bulaga!* merchandise at stake. Such contests encourage further engagement of audiences outside the content that airs on television.

Echoing Carol Vernallis's work that examines the intertwining relationships between digital cinema, the music video genre, and YouTube (2013), the public's consumption of *Eat Bulaga!* illustrates the increasingly blurred boundaries between different content platforms. Their viewing habits are also diversified, as audiences are able to consume the programme not only through its live broadcast on television, but also through a combination of official and fan-posted material available online. Several audience members I met even shared a preference for watching *Eat Bulaga!*'s segments and performances through social media websites, due in part to the accessibility of the medium, which allows one to be entertained by the show's spectacle at any given time or place as long as an internet connection is within reach. Additionally, some viewers cited the short lengths of video clips and their potential to be instantly shared with other people — features that have augmented the ease and enjoyment of their viewing experiences. As Vernallis writes: "[A] clip's interest derives from its associations with colleagues, family, friends, and contexts within communities. Often clips get forwarded because there's an intensity of affect that can't be assimilated: humorous or biting, only forwarding it will diffuse its aggressiveness or power to hold us fast" (2013, 9). While this is true of the general sharing of clips on the internet, *Eat Bulaga!*'s online presence is indeed strengthened by the programme's emphasis on community, where a given clip immediately has a captive audience in the form of a millions-strong fanbase.

Furthermore, the immediate online feedback from fans communicates to the show's producers which segments and performances the audiences liked or disliked, according to Poochie Rivera:

“We get to see what they love or hate based on how many ‘likes’ a post or video gets. Especially now that you can express yourself on Facebook through positive or negative emojis like hearts, or laughing faces, or angry faces. We get a sense of whether a performance worked or not, and whether we should continue doing something similar. So yes, social media feedback definitely has influenced the way we run *Eat* these days, and I think it's great for the show” (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

Asked to share specific instances when feedback from audiences on social media have directly influenced the programme's content, producer Antonio Tuviera said:

“Without naming any names, we have let go of some co-hosts and presenters based on overwhelmingly negative comments they get on Facebook or Twitter, for example. In our singing contests, we pick winners who we know are popular and beloved by the masses. (...) Again, our show is for the public, so we make day-to-day decisions based on who they want to keep seeing on the show” (personal communication, 15 August 2016).

As these statements imply, social media websites have served as informal tools for the show's production staff to measure audience reception and gauge their satisfaction with the various content that appear on the programme. This is a crucial development, as the

show's creators stated earlier that they make the show for the fans, "giving them what they want". But while it was unclear how the producers and presenters were able to appraise and determine exactly what type of content the majority of their audiences wanted back in the 1990s and 2000s, the feedback that they get from viewers today on social media has allowed them to evaluate the show's impact, sometimes in real time, as Rivera and Tuviera confirmed.

It is a structure of content creation that complicates the Bourdieuan framework ascribed to mass media in the Philippines in the introductory chapter; that is, a top-down operation whereby members of the upper classes of Philippine society control the entertainment industry and, consequently, the content consumed by the lower-class audiences. I argue that through digital mediation, the viewers of *Eat Bulaga!* today — the masa, as the producers refer to them — are no longer mere spectators of the circumstances of production controlled by the creators of the show. By participating on online platforms that allow them to evaluate the programme, the audience now take part in the process of creating the content that they consume. This development also destabilises Herman and Chomsky's (2002) contention that the mass media serve the ends of the elite through their status as a powerful filter of the messages transmitted to audiences, resulting in the preservation of an existing social hierarchy. Digital mediation has provided for Philippine television programmes such as *Eat Bulaga!* an alternative framework for content-creation that recognises the experience, reception, and sentiments of the viewing public, particularly those belonging to the lower classes who may not have felt included or heard in past discourses concerning culture. In this manner, interactive digital media have allowed the masses to gain a sense of social control that was once exclusively dominated by the moneyed elite.

These assertions do not presume that the content of *Eat Bulaga!* is no longer directed and overseen by powerful producers and managers. Undoubtedly, producers still hold key control over the show's official social media pages through their ability to promote specific content to their audience; in addition, they can also remove any fan postings as they please. I argue, however, that the incorporation of viewers into the production process has been a fundamental aspect of *Eat Bulaga!*'s success. Crucially, the existence of an all-positive, market-driven mass entertainment is an impracticable notion, as long as institutions such as television networks are controlled by an infrastructure of profit and advertising revenue. Indeed, the New Manila Sound's entertainment and empowerment of the Filipino masses cannot entirely be regarded as a positive gesture when considering the scene's status as a capitalist and now-officialised culture — one that can be viewed as deceptive and manipulative of its followers. The success of *Eat Bulaga!* (and, later, *Aegis*) continues to create wealth not only for producers and performers, but also for corporations and advertisers that back their media enterprise. In this manner, the New Manila Sound embodies an underlying yet crucial message concerning a transfer of power within Filipino society: from Marcos's military rule to an infrastructure of communication (i.e. the digital age). This represents a massive shift that has been radically enabling for the masses, but ultimately favourable towards the scene's creators. This is all to stress that while the New Manila Sound has done a lot of good in defining and reflecting the identities and tastes of the country's lower-class majority, the scene still needs to be understood as deeply rooted in the structures of capitalist profit and commercial gain.

Digital nostalgia scene

Aside from providing a platform for audiences to form communities, consume content, and express feedback concerning *Eat Bulaga!*, social media websites have also enabled viewers to be re-introduced to past performances from the show — and thus to the creation of a nostalgia scene within the phenomenon of the New Manila Sound. In recent years, there have been hundreds of unofficial archival video clips from previous episodes of *Eat Bulaga!*, particularly performances from the late 1980s and 1990s, that have been uploaded on Facebook and on YouTube, probably by fans who have managed to keep recordings of episodes of the show through analogue video recording in the form of VHS tapes. These videos on Facebook and YouTube have been viewed, discussed, and shared by audiences, particularly those who were supporters of the show in the 1990s, but also by members of younger generations who are coming across these past performances for the first time.

As an example, there are multiple video clips posted online from an episode that originally aired on 18 February 1989, when *Eat Bulaga!* premiered on its new station ABS-CBN. A recording of the episode's opening musical performance, featuring Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, and Joey de Leon singing the programme's new theme track, has garnered over 400,000 views on the "Dabarkads Nation" Facebook page and over 32,000 views on YouTube, in a clip uploaded by a user named CJ Velasco. On the comments sections of these uploaded videos, most of the viewer discussions waxed nostalgic about the programme and its early beginnings. As an example, a user named Warley Concepcion commented on the YouTube video of the opening theme performance: "During those times, other shows could not compete [against *Eat Bulaga!*]. I really miss their contests and games from back then — there were no dull moments. From the opening spiels to

the talent searches, dance and singing contests (...) and of course, *Bulagaan*. (...) The simple joys and laughter that each segment gave was more than enough to entertain.”⁶⁰

Why might there be a sense of nostalgia for the programme’s past, particularly the decade of the 1990s, among its fans today? Though nostalgia for “the good old days” arguably represents a trait of human ageing, perhaps such wistful yearning also insinuates a dissatisfaction with the current content of *Eat Bulaga!*. Concepcion’s comment reflects a longing for “the simple joys and laughter” yielded by the show during that time, which may imply an aversion to the new segments on the programme that have replaced those from that decade, as if the show’s original content represented a more effective form of entertainment.⁶¹ Such sentimentality towards the *Eat Bulaga!* of the 1990s may also be interpreted as a testament to the qualities audiences desire from works of popular culture: consistency and a lack of complication.

There are a number of examples from my online research that suggest this dissatisfaction with the current content of *Eat Bulaga!* and a nostalgic yearning for the “golden age” of the 1990s. Take the case of a video clip of Mitoy Yonting’s performance from the show’s 16 April 1999 episode — where he covered The Beatles’s “Help!” in the impersonation and singing contest *Ikaw at Echo* — which has been uploaded on YouTube by a user named DormsforNorm. It has close to a million views, with many of the 265

⁶⁰ Taken from the comments section of the video titled “Eat Bulaga Theme on 10th Year Anniversary and first telecast on ABS-CBN video”; <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0j1lf-EvTKY>>.

⁶¹ This sense of nostalgia for *Eat Bulaga!*’s content and segments during the 1990s can be considered a form of “restorative nostalgia”, following Svetlana Boym’s classic cultural study that explores spaces of collective nostalgia and personal self-fashioning in the twenty-first century. Restorative nostalgia, Boym offers, views the past with the hope of recreating it; reflecting a desire to rebuild and relive idealised moments (2001).

comments discussing how Yonting's career started on the *Eat Bulaga!* stage, as well as praising how his singing style has improved throughout the years. While most of the comments were overwhelmingly positive in tone, one comment critical of Yonting's performance, posted by a user named Awitune, reflected on the show's criteria for its talent competition segments: "You're lucky, Mitoy, that majority of Pinoys think *kenkoy*s [jokers or jesters] like you are real singers. They don't understand that singing contests are about the voice, not who can screech the loudest."⁶²

Another video posted on YouTube features a performance by Rachelle Ann Go, performing Celine Dion's "All By Myself" during the *Birit Baby* competition in 1998. The video, uploaded by a user named Nestea25, has garnered over 112,000 views and 70 comments, mostly praising Go's exceptional talent since she was a child. "Wow, so young and already born to be a diva!" posted a user named Jeox Henri.⁶³ Both the videos of Yonting's and Go's performances from the 1990s were also shared on the "Dabarkads Nation" Facebook page, where multiple comments implored the show's producers to revive the segments on *Eat Bulaga!*. A post by Clement Jasmin on Yonting's performance, dated 13 January 2014, read: "*EB* producers: can you please bring back these amazing singing and impersonating contests like *Ikaw at Echo*? They are much more entertaining to watch. I'm sure I'm not alone, right my Dabarkads?" Jasmin's post has been "liked" by

⁶² Taken from the comments section of the video titled "Mitoy Yonting on Eat Bulaga - Help", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1j0FVf0S6M>. The word *kenkoy* is Filipino slang derived from a comics character created by Romualdo Ramos and Tony Velasquez in 1928 (De Vera 2011).

⁶³ Taken from the comments section of the video titled "Rachelle Ann Go Birit Baby", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8nJ6qv_mSA.

over 1,500 other users.⁶⁴ That Jasmin made the effort to post his petition on a social media website displays an awareness on the part of audience members of the effectiveness of digital platforms in reaching out to the show's cast and crew.

As it happened, three months later, on April of 2014, a segment titled *GGSS: Gayang-Gaya! Siyang-Siya!* (Copied Perfectly, Exactly Like the Original) debuted on *Eat Bulaga!* and ran for a year. A talent contest where performers lip-synced and copied the looks of foreign musicians, it was adapted from the show's impersonation contests from the 1990s: *Ikan at Ako*, *Doble Kara*, and *Gaya-Gaya, Puto Maya*. According to director Poochie Rivera, they revived the segment precisely because of a substantial number of requests from audience members, particularly older viewers who were fans of the segments in the 1990s. She said, "We've been hearing it for so long now, from so many people, especially the moms and dads: 'Please bring back *Gaya-Gaya*, it's very funny' — and so we did" (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

Asked if it was that specific post by Jasmin on Facebook that encouraged the show's producers to revive the show for the present-day, Rivera replied: "I don't remember anymore, honestly, but we definitely received so many requests and comments on social media saying they wanted the segment, or something like it, back on *EB*. That was not the only one asking for *Gaya-Gaya*" (17 August 2016). The revival of these singing and impersonation segments is another proof of how the producers of *Eat Bulaga!* have turned to social media for feedback related to the programme, and how comments from the viewers have influenced the content that appears on the show. It also demonstrates how digital technology has empowered audiences by providing them a platform to share their nostalgic longing and affection for content and performances from the pro-

⁶⁴ Taken from the "Dabarkads Nation" Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/701981156518387>.

gramme's past — such as fans posting unofficial recordings of clips from the 1990s on social media websites, participating in discussions about such unearthed material, and communicating to the producers their yearning for similar performances to be revived on the show.

Expanding storytelling methods and platforms

After its domination of the Philippine television industry throughout the decade of the 1990s, *Eat Bulaga!* was able to consistently garner a wide viewership throughout the 2000s, maintaining its status as the most-watched variety programme on local television. But from the early 2000s onwards, afternoon and late-night *teleseryes* (Filipino soap operas; the word *teleserye* is derived from the words “television” and “*serye*”, or series), as well as drama and comedy series imported from Mexico (*telenovelas*) and Korea (known in the Philippines as *koreanovelas*), began to dominate audience ratings. As a result, *Eat Bulaga!* had to let go of its status as the most popular programme airing on television. While my analysis thus far may have presented the show as rather bulletproof, this development demonstrates that the programme was far from immune to the competition of viewer ratings — and it therefore had to adapt itself to the evolving preferences of the mass audience towards the allures of soap operas.

So, in July of 2015, *Eat Bulaga!* introduced a new original half-hour segment it called a *Kalyeserye* (derived from the words *kalye* or street, and *serye* or series), the programme's parody version of teleseryes. Part-scripted, part-improvisational, and part-musical, the *Kalyeserye* featured the bizarre, physical, and slapstick comedy that *Eat Bulaga!* pioneered back in the 1990s. It starred a fictional romantic couple named AlDub, which was a portmanteau of their names Alden Richards (who played himself, an aspiring actor and singer) and Yaya Dub (a poor girl who works as a house maid; *yaya* is a Filipino word

for nanny). Richards was a new presenter on the show, while the character of Yaya Dub was portrayed by Maine Mendoza, a non-celebrity who had found minor fame after videos of her using the mobile phone app Dubsmash (where users lip-sync over audio clips of songs or films) went viral on social media.



Figure 11. Alden Richards and Maine Mendoza during the 16 July 2015 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Bert de Leon.

The premise of their quirky fairytale-inspired *Kaheserye* was that Richards and Yaya Dub were only able to interact while appearing on opposite sides of a split-screen on live television (as seen in fig. 11), communicating to each other by lip-syncing audio samples of pop songs and dialogue from movies.⁶⁵ This split-screen template simulates the interface

⁶⁵ Most of the songs often used on the segment are contemporary American pop tracks such as Los Del Rio's "Macarena" (1993), Lou Bega's "Mambo No. 5" (1999), Bryan White's "God Gave Me You" (1999), Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" (2014), Brandon Beal's "Twerk It Like Miley" (2014), Rihanna's "Work" (2016), and Ariana Grande's "Focus" (2016).

of popular video-chat applications such as Skype and FaceTime, which indicates the programme's intention to market and peddle the segment to the social media generation. During the first episode of the *Kahyeserye* on 16 July 2015, when Richards and Yaya Dub were introduced for the first time by the show's presenters, Yaya Dub was so overwhelmed with seeing Richards on the other half of the split-screen, that she burst out in song.

PRESENTER ALLAN K: Yaya is blushing because of Alden. Yaya, stop trying to act cute.

PRESENTER PAOLO BALLESTEROS: You're so *pabebe* [Filipino slang for acting like a baby].

Yaya Dub hides her face behind an oversized hand fan, as Alden laughs.

PRESENTER JOEY DE LEON: That's the first time I've seen her smile. The first time I've seen her laugh.

Yaya Dub lip-syncs the pop track "I Gotta Feeling" by The Black Eyed Peas (2009):

I gotta feeling that tonight's gonna be a good night

That tonight's gonna be a good night

That tonight's gonna be a good, good night

Later, Yaya Dub was asked if she had anything to say to Alden. In response, she lip-syncs the Filipino pop-ballad "Babalala Na" (Whatever) by Nadine Lustre and James Reid (2014):

Naninivala na ako so forever

I now believe in forever

Magmula nung nakilala kita

Ever since I met you

This example featured the type of harmless mocking that *Eat Bulaga!* has promoted on their segments and performances since the 1990s, with the presenters teasing the character of Yaya Dub in a scoffing tone. The subject of their ridicule, Yaya Dub, seems to not mind as she plays along with their jibes. She even bursts into song. Her choice of music for a man she just met, featuring the lyric “I gotta feeling that tonight’s gonna be a good night”, also reflected the show’s long-standing mischievous humour. A key difference here, however, is that the original pop song is played as it is — only lip-synced for humour, yet not musically “damaged” by out-of-tune singing, as it was in previous segments such as *Bulagaan*.

AlDub’s rise to popularity was staggering. By the end of their first week on the air, *Eat Bulaga!* had already doubled the programme’s regular television ratings (AGB Nielsen 2015). A month later, the show was garnering ratings as high as 30 to 35 per cent of total television viewers, numbers that it had not received since a special anniversary episode back in 2004. Meanwhile, its rival musical variety programme, *It’s Showtime*, was scoring only about 15 per cent (Kantar Media 2015). Days after its premiere, the popular press began to take notice of *Eat Bulaga!*’s new segment. In one of the first newspaper articles written about AlDub, the *Manila Standard* called them “an overnight sensation”, in a story titled “Make Way for Alden and Yaya Dub” and published on 28 July 2015:

“The long-running noontime show suddenly got elevated TV ratings figures after the introduction of the new “love team” on July 16. (...) Obviously, the Kapuso network [a nickname for *Eat Bulaga!*’s home station GMA] has hit the

jackpot with Alden and Yaya Dub, or AlDub to their fans. (...) They even now have dedicated Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts – all created by their supportive fans that rapidly grow in numbers each day. (...) The Kapuso network has been trying to build up several love teams but none of them got this kind of reception from the public. Even the established on-screen pairs in the network don't experience such massive attention" (Wang 2015).

As the *Manila Standard* reported, AlDub quickly became a phenomenon online, particularly on the social media websites Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. On Twitter, a hashtag named after the couple (#AlDub) trended daily in the Philippines. On YouTube and Facebook, video clip recordings from various episodes were being uploaded by viewers, and then shared and discussed with others, particularly fans who were not able to watch the show live because they were at work or in school. A video uploaded on *Eat Bulaga's* official Facebook page, hours after the segment first aired, has garnered close to 7 million views and over 200,000 "likes" and comments.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, one of the first videos uploaded on YouTube by a regular viewer, a video titled "AlDub Eat Bulaga (from Day 1 to Day 9)" from a user named Doll Mae, put together recorded clips from the first few episodes of the segment. It has garnered over 3 million views and about 1,000 comments.⁶⁷

In a story titled "Split-screen TV Fairy Tale 'AlDub' hit in old, new media", published on the front page of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* on August 16, 2015, the broadsheet's entertainment critic Bayani San Diego Jr. reported on how AlDub's *Kaheserye* was

⁶⁶ The video can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/EBdabarkads/videos/961700927210773>.

⁶⁷ The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MIH9Tu0-9c>.

being consumed by Filipino viewers both through live television and on the internet, converging both broadcast and social media for the first time in Philippine television history. It was a milestone for *Eat Bulaga!* to be featured on the *Inquirer* — on its front page no less — since the paper, and other national broadsheets, have largely dismissed the programme as insignificant prior to the AlDub phenomenon. San Diego’s article reports:

“The unlikely duo AlDub’s budding romance has posted through-the-roof ratings for the 36-year-old noontime variety show *Eat Bulaga!*. (...) It is not uncommon for Makati [the business district of Manila] employees (some working in this newspaper) to delay their lunch break to 1:30pm in order to catch AlDub in the programme. (...) Some would wait until the wee hours when the segment is uploaded to the show’s official Facebook account” (San Diego 2015).⁶⁸

On 24 October 2015, AlDub’s parody soap opera took a historic turn when the couple finally met in person during a special *Eat Bulaga!* episode filmed live from the Philippine Arena, the world’s largest indoor venue that accommodated 55,000 of their supporters. Tickets for the show were sold out in three hours on its day of release, with all the proceeds donated for the building of libraries across the country, according to the producers. The event marked the first time in the programme’s four-decade run that it broadcast an entire three-hour show without advertisements. The episode registered audience ratings of 51 per cent of the entire country’s population, the largest viewership of a programme recorded in Philippine television history (AGB Nielsen 2015). The episode’s so-

⁶⁸ For more commentary on AlDub by the popular press, see also *Bloomberg* 2015; Chen 2015; Joaquin 2015; Lazaro-Elemos 2015; Maboloc 2015; and Reyes 2015.

cial media hashtag, #AlDubEBTamangPanahon (The Right Time), yielded 41 million tweets and set a Guinness World Record for the most-discussed single topic on Twitter in the span of 24 hours (Lynch 2016).

The actors Richards and Mendoza have gone on to forge successful careers in film and music, releasing several blockbuster films and chart-topping albums. Their romantic comedy film, *My Bebe Love: #KiligPaMore*, was released on December 2015 and currently holds the record for the highest opening-day gross in the history of Philippine cinema. Their popular *Kaheserye* continues to run until today, without the split-screen. They still lip-sync songs to each other and perform musical numbers together. Richards and Mendoza also now host other musical and comedy segments on *Eat Bulaga!*. On 24 October 2016, a year after their first meeting in-person, the characters of Richards and Yaya Dub tied the knot in a fictional wedding ceremony held inside an actual Catholic Church, with the entire affair broadcast live on *Eat Bulaga!*. According to the show's producers, they plan to keep the segment running as long as audiences want to keep watching. All the while, AlDub's social media following have only gotten stronger: on Twitter, Richards and Mendoza have a combined 10 million followers, while their official Facebook page has about 2 million followers. Like *Eat Bulaga!*, there are hundreds of fan pages and accounts dedicated to the couple.

Aside from being the first parody soap opera in the country that combined musical spectacle with melodrama and slapstick comedy, there was nothing particularly novel about the plot of AlDub when compared to the stories, thematic content, and tone of other *Eat Bulaga!* segments in the past, as well as of the numerous soap operas and comedy sitcoms on Philippine television. Its exceptional significance lies in its wielding of digital mediation, attracting not only a greater number of audiences but a variety of ages as well, including those from a younger generation who were not regular viewers of the

show in the past. Through AlDub and their *Kaheserye*, *Eat Bulaga!* became the first television programme in the Philippines to be consumed by audiences both online and offline. As a business journalist on the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* observed:

“The digital age has arrived in Philippine television, and broadcast companies like ABS-CBN Corp., GMA Network Inc., and TV5 are rapidly upgrading — while learning along the way — to capitalise on this next area of opportunity. The latest development in this shift came from an unlikely source: The almost four-decade-old *Eat Bulaga!* spawning an innovative segment” (Camus 2015).

In a recent article for *Media and Communication* titled “Re-Locating the Spaces of Television Studies” (2016), Anna Cristina Pertierra calls on television scholars to move their spheres of concentration from European and North American media industries to other overlooked parts of the globe, in order to understand the diversity of television landscapes. Narrating AlDub’s rise and popularity in the Philippines, she argues how “broadcast television is successful in ways that could only be dreamed of by television executives in the so-called ‘world centres’ of the global entertainment industry” (2016, 123). Pertierra briefly cites *Eat Bulaga!*’s presence on social media online as an example of how broadcast television is allying with other media platforms: “Rather than becoming fragmented or diminished by the rise of social media and mobile content, [*Eat Bulaga!*] harnesses content and mobilises audiences in such a way that the daily TV programme could best be seen as the core product which defines a brand with multi-platform reach” (2016,

127).⁶⁹ Digital technologies and social media websites have indeed allowed the show to generate unique content, expand their viewership, and increase their engagement with audiences.

Asked about his thoughts on *Eat Bulaga!* breaking the ground in terms of utilising the resources of the internet to expand its audience reach and create off-the-air platforms for content engagement, director Bert de Leon told me: “It was incredible — we didn’t know AlDub would turn out this popular and that it would make so much history for the show, not just in terms of audience ratings, but also when it comes to the fans who were watching and talking about the show online” (personal communication, 21 August 2016). Producer Antonio Tuviera said, “The AlDub phenomenon was very unprecedented in our industry and probably our show’s biggest success story — both online and offline — in recent years” (personal communication, 15 August 2016). In hindsight, while the exceptional success of the combination of broadcast and online media in the Philippines is unsurprising — particularly for a country that is extremely enthusiastic with social media usage⁷⁰ — AlDub’s sensation was considered novel back in 2015 and set the mould for the local mass media industry.

⁶⁹ Pertierra’s article is one of two recent scholarly works that examine the AlDub phenomenon from a media studies perspective. The other is written by Raul Pertierra (her father) for the journal *Philippine Studies*. In “Anthropology and the AlDub Nation: Entertainment as Politics and Politics as Entertainment” (2016), he provides a summary of AlDub’s rise to stardom, attributing its success to *Eat Bulaga!*’s consistent ability “to generate feelings of joy, happiness, and fulfilment” from its audience (294).

⁷⁰ In a February 2018 report by the London-based firm We Are Social, the Philippines topped the world’s list of “heaviest” social media usage: there are 67 million social media users in the country (out of the total population of 103 million), with Filipinos spending an average of four hours a day on social media websites, primarily Facebook and YouTube (Camus 2018).

Eat Bulaga! has utilised digital technologies to create various types of content that engage audiences across multiple platforms and formats. As director Poochie Rivera revealed, AlDub's popularity on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has compelled the programme's production team to constantly upload unique content online: "After each segment airs on TV, let's go — we put it up online, on our Facebook page, then tweet it everywhere. But for a lot of fans, that's not enough, right? So we post behind-the-scenes images and backstage clips. It's crazy — and I love every second of it because I think we're making TV history" (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

Through its application of "transmedia storytelling" — invoking Jenkins's term to describe the act of telling a single story across multiple formats using current digital technologies (2006) — *Eat Bulaga!* has engendered a culture of television viewing that does not cease when the show goes off the air.⁷¹ Audiences continue their consumption online — which they access via a computer, a tablet, or a mobile phone — of stories developed not only by the show's producers, but also by fellow viewers. Transmedia storytelling has also created different points of entry for the various audience segments of *Eat Bulaga!*. Some viewers first discovered and continue to consume content related to AlDub mostly through the internet, while some fans prefer to watch them live during the show's daily noontime broadcast. Rivera also acknowledged how much the AlDub segment has been influenced by opinions posted by viewers on the internet:

"We all check social media sites everyday to find out how fans are feeling about the story so far. We make adjustments based on what they want to see.

It's literally a live soap opera, performed on live national TV. Alden and

⁷¹ Kalin Kalinov recently offered an updated definition: "A transmedia narrative is a multimedia product which communicates its narrative through a multitude of integrated media channels" (2017, 66).

Maine also of course read comments online and they know what the fans like and don't really like that much, so their performances are definitely affected by audience feedback" (personal communication, 17 August 2016).

For both the creators and consumers of *Eat Bulaga!*, social media websites have served as an important platform for feedback and dialogue, almost like a large-scale focus group discussion. Online, the audience can express their views instantly and conveniently, allowing the producers and performers to swiftly adjust the show's content to address their desires. This development manifests the quality of immediacy that digital mediation has afforded the programme and its viewers. It is important to note that prior to the age of AlDub, many local and foreign celebrities and musicians had already been interacting with their respective fanbases around the world through social media websites, primarily Twitter and Instagram. But *Eat Bulaga!*'s venture marks the first time a Filipino television programme — as a collective, not merely through its individual performers — has utilised the internet to develop and exploit a transmedia presence.

The quick rise of Richards and Mendoza to stardom can also be attributed to the ability of social media websites to be consumed by a wide audience at any time of the day. As Richards said during an interview backstage on the set of the show: "I think when we started out on the show, we had some fans — the regular Dabarkads and viewers — those who were watching it live, right? But word really spread when videos from our episodes were posted on YouTube or Facebook. And it all happened so quickly: our videos were being passed around on email, on Facebook, posted on Twitter, etcetera." Mendoza agreed, saying she has met several fans who tell her that they watch the show entirely through YouTube video clips uploaded by ordinary users who are not associated with the programme's production team: "Many of our friends and supporters, they work

in an office from 9 to 5, so they don't get to watch the show at noon. But through YouTube, they get to follow our story. They can watch us anytime and anywhere." These statements indicate an awareness on the part of the performers that their work is consumed by the public through multiple media platforms that often converge based on the habits and choices of individual viewers.

Furthermore, the internet has made it easier for fans to congregate together with other individuals who possess a similar fascination for the show. Mendoza explained, "I think when you see that a lot of other people like what you like, you start to support that 'thing' more and more because you know you're not alone — and it becomes exciting because you're all watching together. It's so cool because a lot of people have told me that they've met a lot of friends just by watching our show" (personal communication, 15 September 2016). Mendoza's point reinforces how online platforms have encouraged the articulation and negotiation of the individual and collective identities of viewers. Digital technology, and its utilisation by *Eat Bulaga!* and the audience, has certainly created more opportunities (compared to the 1990s) for fans to form communities based merely on a common appreciation for the programme and its performers. Audiences share empathy and camaraderie with each other as parts of a social network, where *Eat Bulaga!* (and AIDub) are the vehicles for generating their cohesion online. Even if the imagined community of these online users might be unofficial, unorganised, or even undefined by its very members, the reach of digital technology has nonetheless bestowed on these fans a quality of togetherness — of an intimacy that can be obtained by logging on to the internet at any given time or place.

Through the AIDub segment, *Eat Bulaga!* is also the first programme on Philippine television to embody Jenkins's related concept of "convergence culture", which he defines as a cultural process resulting from the collision between old and new media,

generating a flow of content across multiple media platforms (2006). Viewers consume the AlDub segment when it is broadcast on television, but they continue their consumption off the air through both official and fan-based content, such as videos and images posted on social media websites. They engage in migratory behaviour, turning to a variety of platforms in search of entertainment experiences. As online platforms foster peer-to-peer interaction and participatory consumption, audiences redefine the characterisation of a television viewer. YouTube, in particular, has functioned as a primary medium in the public's consumption of *Eat Bulaga!*'s recent segments, providing a mechanism where individuals and communities are able to absorb and respond to multiple narratives based on a work, whether created by the show's producers or by fellow members of the audience.⁷²

These digital developments have given rise to what Jenkins calls "participatory culture" in media, which contrasts with past notions of passive spectatorship on the part of audiences, as viewers are more empowered to participate in the dissemination of the show's content. Michael Strangelove has argued that the internet, particularly the platform provided by YouTube, has altered the audience's relationship to commercial media, creating a "hyperactive" audience who participate in the processes of creation, distribution, and consumption of content. He contends that we have moved towards an era of media consumption characterised by mass participation: "The mass audience are moving from their old analogue position as consumers to their new digitised position as producers" (2010, 158).

⁷² In *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green note that YouTube functions as an institution, "operating as a coordinating mechanism between individual and collective creativity and meaning production; and as a mediator between various competing industry-oriented discourses and ideologies and various audience- or user-oriented ones" (2009, 37).

As my ethnographic interviews demonstrate, the producers and consumers of the programme do interact with each other according to an evolving system that recognises the experience, reception, and sentiment of the viewing public. But it is crucial to stress that this development does not indicate an absolute or idyllic participatory culture in the case of *Eat Bulaga!*. While audiences are granted the capability to instantly voice their sentiments online, this arguably manifests a mere semblance of participation on their part, since not all of their discourses or feedback are taken into account or truly affect significant creative decisions. While there are certainly exceptions, generally speaking it is still the producers of the programme that control and determine the show's content. As another example, while there are thousands of fan-made, fan-uploaded videos on social media websites related to the programme — bestowing on ordinary fans the impression that they are active collaborators in production — these videos are typically clips from the live broadcast that had been merely fashioned through a cut-and-paste method, and therefore should be identified as by-products of the show, not original material “created” by the audience.

Ultimately, the producers have remained at the top of the content-creation, decision-making hierarchy. As Jenkins contends, corporations — and the producers and performers beholden to them — still exert greater power than audiences. Moreover, some viewers have greater abilities and opportunities to participate in this convergence culture than others: not all of the show's viewers have access to the internet, and not all who consume content related to the programme on social media actively express their feedback and participate in discussions online. In this manner, digital technology has created a system that is simultaneously enabling and disabling to audiences. Thus, while the current content of *Eat Bulaga!* seemingly incorporates viewers into the creation and production process, it would be inaccurate to conclude that such content reflects the desires

of the programme's entire audience. Nonetheless, developments on digital technology have certainly initiated on Philippine television a complex and ever-changing entertainment experience that is unique to every viewer. It is an experience dependent in part on a consumer's individual situation, such as access to digital technologies, choice of online platforms (whether Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or a combination of them), and personal preferences with regards to content.

Broadening class-based demographics

Digital mediation has also expanded the profile of the audience of *Eat Bulaga!*, a point that Richards pointed out to me during our conversation: "People who had never seen the show before were suddenly watching because they liked AlDub" (personal communication, 15 September 2016). One of AlDub's most important contributions not only to their programme, but also to the country's entertainment industry, is how their segment — aided by its strong online presence and fandom — has indeed widened *Eat Bulaga!*'s audience reach. It has expanded the show's viewership both in terms of quantity and demographics, such as the inclusion of individuals belonging to the upper classes of society who may not have been avid supporters of the show until now. Borrowing Peterson's analysis of upper-class audiences consuming a wider variety of mass cultural forms (Warde, et al. 2007, 143-64), the show's expanding fanbase may indicate a sense of cultural omnivorousness on the part of Filipino viewers, particularly those from the so-called educated elites. By watching *Eat Bulaga!*, they extend the breadth of their cultural taste to cross established hierarchical boundaries between highbrow (art) and lowbrow (popular) genres. As I observed, more upper-class audiences today no longer possess an antagonistic attitude towards the programme's brand of mass entertainment, a snobbishness previously rooted on rigid rules of exclusion.

Throughout a dozen visits to the show's live production, I met a handful of audience members who revealed that they only started watching *Eat Bulaga!* due to AlDub. Janine, a 26-year-old advertising manager, attended a taping with her friend and co-worker Dawn, who is also 26. Their profiles are distinct from those of the typical lower-class audience of *Eat Bulaga!*; they are not *masa*, a term that the show's producers often used in interviews to describe their target audience, since Janine and Dawn both graduated from private universities and consider themselves to belong to the upper-middle class of society.

They said they were aware of the stereotypes of fans who support the musical variety programme. Janine explained: "I'll be honest — when I first heard about AlDub from one of our officemates, I thought, '*Ay, baduy!*' [How tacky]" — and I think that's what people from the higher classes in society think about shows like this. That it's cheap and corny. I don't know what it is about AlDub, but I don't care — I love them and I'm not shy to admit that" (personal communication, 20 August 2016). Janine's initially negative impression towards AlDub reflected the common perception of people belonging to her social class. Notably, she found the need to emphasise her pride about being an admirer of the show, insinuating that other fans may find it embarrassing to reveal their attachment to a programme known for its brand of kitsch.

During another visit, I recognised Cecile Zamora van Straten, a widely known fashion blogger, newspaper editor, and businesswoman sitting on the front row of the audience area, accompanied by two other friends, who work as fashion designers. Zamora van Straten said she was not there as a journalist but as a fan. It was actually her second time watching the show live. She said, "I love AlDub. I mean who doesn't? They are all everybody's talking about until now, even a year later." Zamora van Straten, who is in her early 50s, said she arrived at the studio at around 9:30 am like the other regular fans,

but through a connection with someone in production, she was allowed inside early in order to secure a seat on the front row. She had seen a few episodes of *Eat Bulaga!* in the past, but had never been an avid viewer until AlDub's *Kalyeserye* was introduced on the show. She said she knew many people in her circles of friends and colleagues who are big fans of the segment:

“It’s funny because this type of show, we would never admit to liking something like this before. Be honest — because I wouldn’t. It’s a show that our *yayas* [nannies] used to watch before in the kitchen. But now I guess nobody cares. I feel like it’s because it doesn’t matter anymore these days whether you like something *sosyal* [Filipino slang for high class] or something — something like AlDub. We have a higher tolerance for what other people like or dislike — or maybe we just don’t have time to care because there are bigger problems in the world” (personal communication, 24 August 2016).

That Filipino consumers no longer concern themselves with the established boundaries between high and low culture would seem a strong generalisation to make, but it may be justifiable based on the case of Zamora van Straten herself. Through the AlDub segment on *Eat Bulaga!*, viewers like her who may have previously shunned cultural products such as musical variety programmes have tuned in to watch the show on live television and/or on social media websites. The rise of AlDub has resulted in a redefinition of the typical audience of *Eat Bulaga!*, with viewers from the elite classes joining in the fandom of the show’s regular viewers who belong to the lower sectors of society. As earlier stated, this development may indeed indicate that cultural tastes among Filipino consumers have become more open and fluid, and that audiences, particularly those from the upper classes,

are becoming more omnivorous consumers who no longer care about perceived hierarchies in art and culture, as Zamora van Straten affirmed. It is essential to note that a significant aspect of the concept of omnivorousness is that those from higher class positions possess the cultural capital and social status necessary to move across different class boundaries — resources that the masses typically do not have.

Cultural critic and journalist Jose Lacaba agreed with Zamora van Straten's assessment and said in an email conversation that AlDub's popularity was "a sign of the times", but also not an entirely new development:

"Of course the rich and educated have been watching variety shows since the 80s and 90s. Of course they were watching the soaps and teleseryes in the 2000s. They have been watching all along, though they have not been as active with their expressions of fandom compared to the so-called masses because it was not considered tasteful to like these things back then. The important question is why they are suddenly "coming out" now as supporters of AlDub? And I think it's because taste has now become more flexible. The idea of high taste is no longer simply aligned to the typical subjects and concepts associated with it, like luxurious products. It can include reality television, *ukay-ukay* [clothing from second-hand or consignment stores], and fast-food joints" (personal communication, 2 November 2016).

Lacaba's statement conveys that upper-class viewers may have been disinclined to acknowledge their enjoyment of *Eat Bulaga!* in the 1990s for fear of being judged by others for making viewing choices that were not considered cultured or tasteful. Today, however, there is more flexibility and open-mindedness when it comes to determining what

constitutes good taste. This could be due to a variety of reasons, such as the country's changing social conditions, a weakening class divide, the fragmentation of elite culture in the Philippine entertainment industry, or even the changing status of *Eat Bulaga!*. Indeed, as the country's longest-running musical variety programme, it has become a familiar component of Philippine popular culture, so more and more people may have learned to "accept" the type of entertainment it presents.

But to what extent does this omnivorous consumption apply to other forms of culture and facets of life in the country? Jose Buenconsejo, the current dean of the College of Music at the University of the Philippines, the country's premier state university, said that while he acknowledges AlDub's phenomenal success amongst a wide range of audiences across the country, he thinks that once their popularity dies off, the elite and educated viewers will return to their usual consumption of foreign television programmes, feature films, and music records. He said in an interview:

"Is AlDub being watched by a lot of Filipinos? Yes. Do these viewers include those from the upper sectors of the country who weren't watching these variety shows before? Yes. Will they keep watching *Eat Bulaga!* when the AlDub segment stops or when audiences grow tired of them? I don't think so. Will they begin to watch other variety shows or similar shows because they enjoyed AlDub? I honestly don't think so" (personal communication, 15 September 2016).

Buenconsejo's critique suggests that elite and educated viewers were somehow unwillingly beguiled to watch and support the programme, since the show does not adhere with their typically refined tastes. His appraisal of the segment — although a deviation from

the general positive views shared by the show's producers, stars, fans, and popular press — does impart fair points, particularly his critique of bestowing AlDub the status of trailblazer in the permanent expansion of the television choices made by upper-class audiences. AlDub may have pulled it off, but they could be an exceptional case. In a few years, we may look back at the performers as merely a fad that came, entertained, and went, similar to tens and hundreds of *Eat Bulaga!*'s segments during the past decades. However, its status as an exception to the established system of cultural consumption in the Philippines is precisely what makes it a significant, even historic, cultural phenomenon. Even if the upper-class viewers return to their usual consumption habits of exclusively high art forms, it does not invalidate *Eat Bulaga!*'s importance and relevance to Philippine culture.

In contrast to this position, Buenconsejo told me that he was not convinced that the show's AlDub phenomenon will have long-lasting effects on the country's popular culture: "They're a fad, like many others shows and singers and actors and celebrities that have come before them, and then went away after a certain time." Asked what he was basing his assumptions on, Buenconsejo candidly replied: "It's just not a good work of art, and good works of art are the ones that last, the ones that leave creative and artistic legacies" (personal communication, 15 September 2016). His statement reveals a stance that mainstream media products are not sustainable forms of art but rather trends that audiences will eventually tire of, as opposed to higher art traditions. In categorising *Eat Bulaga!* as "not a good work of art", Buenconsejo has also judged other cultural products that have been influenced by the programme as substandard.

Regardless of one's evaluation of *Eat Bulaga!* and AlDub's *Kaheserye* as cultural products, as works of entertainment, or as works of art with enduring legacies in the popular culture industry, there is no doubting of their accomplishment in creating a seg-

ment that became a national sensation both on television and on the internet. It captivated and engaged an audience comprised of multiple sectors of Philippine society — from the young to the old, from the rich to the poor — a feat that has never been credited to any previous television programme produced in the country.

Eat Bulaga!’s place in Philippine culture

During the time I was conducting my fieldwork at the *Eat Bulaga!* studio in August and September of 2016, the programme featured six segments as part of its daily line-up of content. There was AlDub’s *Kalyeserye*, as well as the long-running musical knock-knock segment *Bulagaan*, with the format exactly the same as it was when the segment first aired in the early 1990s. There were also two segments dedicated to giving away prizes to home viewers, particularly those living in less fortunate neighbourhoods in Manila. In *Juan for All, All for Juan: Bayanihan of d’ Pipo!*⁷³, neighbourhoods work together on social projects for their district, such as collecting plastic bottles that are turned into armchairs donated to schools. In *Sugod Bahay* (House Attack), several presenters make surprise visits to poverty-stricken neighbourhoods and give away cash prizes to chosen residents.

These segments that lend assistance to the needy mark a shift in tone on the part of *Eat Bulaga!*, as they are the first in the show’s history that do not entail any form of comedic spectacle. Instead, I regard them as “melodramatic spectacles”, as the chosen subjects who receive welfare are asked to routinely relay their stories of hardships on live television, with the intention of arousing the sympathy of the viewers. There are often tears shed, both from the chosen subjects and the presenters interviewing them. Director Bert de Leon explained: “We decided to create these segments because this is what *Eat*

⁷³ “Juan” refers to Juan de la Cruz, the national personification of the Philippines that represents the everyman. “Bayanihan” refers to the Filipino spirit of communal unity.

Bulaga! is really all about now: giving happiness to everyone — ‘to every Juan’, as they say on the segment — and giving back to the Filipino people who have supported us all these years,” (personal communication, 21 August 2016). To adapt *Eat Bulaga!*’s own invented genre, I contend that these segments can be considered as *kalyeseryes*, or unscripted street soap operas where the plots are derived from the dramatic stories of the “real world”, outside the *Eat Bulaga!* studio. It embodies another category of audience engagement that the show has tapped into: dispensing assistance to communities in need as a newfound cause and theme, with the programme packaging these narratives as inspiring, and often melodramatic, spectacles for the consumption of viewers.

The show’s two other segments are musical contests for talented children and teenagers. In *Music Hero*, contestants age 19 and below show off their skills in playing instruments, typically the piano, guitar, or drums. They perform pop songs, both local and foreign, with the lyrics of the tracks flashing on the television screen — akin to karaoke — so that viewers at home can follow along. Prior to each contestant’s performance, they banter with the show’s presenters. Often this is where whimsical entertainment transpires, as the children attempt to teach the presenters how to play the instruments, with the latter ultimately failing at it in a slapstick manner, eliciting laughter from the audience. While the performances cover local and foreign pop songs, there are no elements of parody or mockery involved; instead, the contestants are judged based on the extent their proficient playing enlivens the audience.



Figure 12. Contestants of *Lola's Playlist: Beat the Champion* during the 12 September 2016 episode of *Eat Bulaga!*. Photograph from Antonio Tuviera.

The other musical segment is called *Lola's Playlist: Beat the Champion* (“lola” is a Filipino word for grandmother), where child contestants cover songs from the 1950s to the 1970s, such as Frank Sinatra’s “You’ll Never Walk Alone” (1963) and Dusty Springfield’s “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me” (1966), which were both performed during the show’s 12 September 2016 episode. Like *Music Hero*, the segment is focused on showcasing the vocal talents of young singers, although amusement is also derived from the children’s colourful costumes inspired by the decade their song originates from (as seen in fig. 12).

The programme’s current segments manifest an evolution in the show’s brand of entertainment from the 1990s until the present-day. While the show’s original sense of humour from the 1990s — marked by slapstick sketches and physical comedy — is very much present on its current run, it is notable that the only segments that continue to fo-

cus on playful mockery are *Bulagaan* and AlDub's *Kaheserye*, which involve the show's presenters. Performers in musical talent contests are no longer subjects of parody and derision like they were in the impersonation segments popularised in the 1990s (and were revived in 2014 and cancelled a year later). In interviews, the show's producers and presenters asserted that they determine the programme's content based on the desires of their audience. It can be surmised that these recent changes in the show's tone and approach to entertainment may have been influenced by feedback from viewers, given the ease by which audiences can express their sentiments on the cultural products they consume, particularly in a time of digital mediation.

Four decades later, *Eat Bulaga!* may have developed a formula for musical variety programmes for the here and now, a show that features a combination of the old and the new: their enduring brand of parody fused with musical spectacles that focus on talent and performance skills, as well as feel-good melodrama that inspires the audience. Their ability to adapt to the entertainment desires of viewers have certainly contributed to their unwavering success. *Eat Bulaga!* remains the highest-rated musical variety programme on television. It continues to make celebrities out of its presenters and performers, with AlDub as recent examples. The trio of Tito Sotto, Vic Sotto, and Joey de Leon remain as national superstars.

De Leon told me: "*Eat Bulaga!* has become the extension of our bathrooms, our kitchens, our homes," (personal communication, 15 August 2016). The same statement applies to the millions of viewers across the Philippines who have tuned in to the show throughout the years — both the loyal, long-time fans and the newer, younger audience engaging with the show on television and on the internet. As a description of the programme reads on *Eat Bulaga!*'s official website: "More than a television show, *Eat Bulaga!* has become part of the Filipino way of life and culture. It is a constant companion of

Filipinos — wherever they are in the world — bringing happiness and hope whenever needed.”⁷⁴

*

In 2005, the Filipino pop-rock band The Itchyworms released their third studio record titled *Noontime Show*. Comprised of 17 tracks, the album was a satirical take on the musical variety programmes and soap operas that have dominated Philippine television since the 1990s. The first track, “Theme from Noontime Show”, lampooned opening theme songs of variety shows, imitating their overly bouncy melodies and spirited summoning of audiences. Content-wise, the song mocked the consistent ease by which these programmes have made stars out of individuals with mediocre talents. It depicted audiences as simple-minded “fools” duped by producers. The song asks in the closing lines: “Is this as far as the masses can go? This is as far as the masses can go.” As the song progresses from one verse to another, its message alternates between a favourable and a critical tone towards variety programmes.

“Theme from Noontime Show”

The Itchyworms (*Noontime Show*, 2005)

Composer and Lyricist: Jugs Jugueta

<i>Halina at sumama</i>	Come and join
<i>Sa programa na pang-masa</i>	Our programme for the masses
<i>Hindi kailangang magaling ka</i>	You don’t have to be great
<i>Basta’t bibo’t bongga ka</i>	Just be keen and fabulous

⁷⁴ Taken from <http://eatbulaga.tv/about.html>.

<i>Wala naman kayong alam</i>	All of you know nothing
<i>Ginagawa kayong tanga</i>	You're all treated like fools
<i>Laging sinusubaybayan</i>	As you watch everyday
<i>Pumila ng maaga</i>	Line up early
<i>Para makubanan ng kamera</i>	To be seen on TV
<i>Pumorma ng magara, ha!</i>	Dress smart
<i>Malay mo madiscover ka!</i>	You could be a big star
<i>Hininintay nila kayo</i>	They're waiting for you
<i>Ang dami n'yong uto-uto</i>	Oh so gullible
<i>Itapon na ang utak n'yo</i>	Throw your brains away
CHORUS:	
<i>Sali na, dalhin ang barkada</i>	Join us, bring your friends
<i>Umuulan dito ng pera</i>	It's raining money here
<i>Sali na, pati ang pamilya</i>	Join us, bring your family
<i>Sa happy-sappy, magic, plastic</i>	In this happy-sappy, magic, plastic
<i>Ihaw-ihaw, all-time</i>	Sizzling, all-time
<i>Noontime show</i>	Noontime show
<i>Sumasayan, umaawit</i>	They dance and sing
<i>Sila kabit na pangit</i>	Even if they don't know how
<i>Walang duda benta sila</i>	No doubt they're a hit
<i>Dahil guwapo at maganda</i>	Because they're handsome and beautiful
<i>Hindi naman kayo tanga</i>	You're not stupid

<i>Ang dami pa namang iba</i>	There are other options out there
<i>Gustong-gusto n'yo pa sila</i>	Yet you still adore these shows

(CHORUS)

<i>Sa libu-libong nakatunganga</i>	All you thousands of bums
<i>Kami lang ang inyong pag-asa</i>	We are your only hope
<i>Tumutok na bawat tanghali</i>	Tune in every noon
<i>Wag na wag na kayong babawi</i>	No need to hesitate

<i>Sumunod ka na lang sa uso</i>	Just follow the trend
<i>Eh ano kung hindi bagay sa'yo</i>	Whether it fits you or not
<i>Sambahin ang mga artista</i>	Worship the stars
<i>Sundan ang bawat kilos nila</i>	Follow their every move

<i>Gasgasin mga lumang plaka</i>	Sing your lungs out
<i>Hanggang dito na lang ang masa</i>	This is as far as the masses can go
<i>Ganito dapat pumorma</i>	This is how to dress up
<i>Para magmukhang artista</i>	To look like a celebrity

<i>Ganito dapat ang kulay</i>	This is what your skin colour should be
<i>Para umunlad ang buhay</i>	To get ahead in life
<i>Ganito dapat ang banda</i>	This is how a band should be
<i>Pag kanta may epal na artista</i>	Led by a shameless celebrity

<i>Hanggang dito na lang ba ang masa?</i>	Is this as far as the masses can go?
<i>Hanggang dito na lang ang masa</i>	This is as far as the masses can go
<i>Hanggang dito na lang ba ang masa?</i>	Is this as far as the masses can go?

Hanggang dito na lang ang masa This is as far as the masses can go

Ironically, the song parodies variety programmes using a brand of mockery and parody — as well as the uptempo, melodic style of the local novelty genre — which were originally conceived by the New Manila Sound, led by *Eat Bulaga!*. When the track was released in 2005, it received acclaim from listeners: fans of The Itchyworms aware of their penchant for satire understood their intentions and commended their pluck in taking on the mainstream television industry. Meanwhile, individuals working on television, including those from *Eat Bulaga!*, spoke highly of the album, particularly this song, because they considered it as a tribute to variety programmes and their significance to the country's popular culture.⁷⁵

I close this chapter with this example because it alludes to several of the critiques concerning *Eat Bulaga!* that were discussed. The song lamented how variety programmes have prioritised the amusement of viewers rather than the showcase of the musical prowess of featured performers: “*Sumasayaw, umaawit / Sila kabit na pangit / Walang duda benta sila / Dabil guwapo at maganda* (They dance and sing / Even if they don't know how / No doubt they're a hit / Because they're handsome and beautiful).” It portrayed these programmes as exploitative of an audience seeking entertainment and diversion in

⁷⁵ The Itchyworms's record went on to win the top Album of the Year prize at the 2006 NU Rock Awards, one of the music industry's most prestigious award-giving bodies. In 2009, the television network ABS-CBN hired Jugs Jugueta — the lead vocalist of The Itchyworms and the song's composer and lyricist — as one of the presenters of its new musical variety show, *It's Showtime*, that will rival *Eat Bulaga!*. Jugueta agreed and even composed the programme's opening theme; he continues to host for the show until today. That one of mass media's boldest critics yielded to its dominance can be interpreted as proof of the mainstream's hold of the country's entertainment industry.

their lives: “*Sa libu-libong nakatunganga / Kami lang ang inyong pag-asa / Tumutok na bawat tanghali* (All you thousands of bums / We are your only hope / Tune in every noon).” As the song and its reception suggests, *Eat Bulaga!* has become a polarising cultural product whose artistic merits and significance to the entertainment industry continues to be disputed, probably more than any other show on local television. But that it remains so beloved by many yet vilified by others attests to the show’s rare and remarkable quality as a cultural product made in the Philippines.

As I have explored in this case study, *Eat Bulaga!* has become the most-watched, most-popular, and longest-running musical variety programme in the country. Tracing the show’s history, and focusing on its run in the decade of the 1990s, I examined the programme’s rise and development by looking at specific musical examples that embodied the type of distinctly kitsch entertainment that *Eat Bulaga!* created and propagated as a pioneer of the New Manila Sound scene. Through interviews with the programme’s creators, stars, performers, supporters, and critics, I assessed the show’s significance to Philippine popular culture. Through fieldwork in the form of interviews, participant observation, and virtual ethnography, I investigated how today’s digital technology, primarily the internet, has affected the programme’s current content-creation, dissemination, and reception amongst audiences, as well as its precipitation and mediation of a nostalgic revival of performances from the show’s past. Throughout the years, there have been a number of similar programmes that have emulated the show’s brand and formula of musical spectacle and lowbrow entertainment, yet none have generated characters and plots, moments and issues, and highs and lows as abundant and fascinating as those created by *Eat Bulaga!*.

Chapter Four

Aegis's Musical Spectacle

Adapting and developing the birit style

We now turn to the case of Aegis, the first mainstream music act to adapt the birit style and kitsch sensibility popularised by the musical segment *Birit Baby* on *Eat Bulaga!*. As I show in the succeeding musical examples, Aegis turned birit — a term the television programme invented in reference to the melismatic singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession — into an entirely new Filipino music genre. Aegis did not simply replicate *Eat Bulaga!*'s style (as stated earlier, in *Birit Baby*'s sombre performances, the focus was on the children's vocal prowess), but rather took the birit technique and fused elements of both melancholic content and comedic performance — a combination that audiences had never encountered before. Moreover, in their adaptation of local and foreign musical elements, Aegis created their own distinct brand of sound to produce a novel take on a power ballad, which stood out in a music industry dominated by nationalistic anthems and saccharine covers of Western pop music. The group's appeal with a mass audience led them to create a scene within the New Manila Sound, influencing other local artists who emulated their style. In turn, Aegis's success also prompted *Eat Bulaga!* to continue producing and launching even more singing contests and segments that featured birit performances, resulting to a transfer of musical style and content that was mutually beneficial to both parties.

The group's first single "Halik" [Kiss], from their debut album of the same name in 1995, exemplified the birit sound right from the song's opening verses, as vocalist Juliet Sunot sings the lyrics almost entirely through emotive growls.⁷⁶ With her natural rasp and a nasal, reedy tone, she loudly belts the song's first line (see example 1), resulting in an arresting opener that commands the listener's attention.



Example 1. Opening line of "Halik". All transcriptions by author.

As marked below, the bold words signify Juliet's extensive usage of abrasive vocal growling as a technique to accentuate the lyrics, particularly in the first five lines of the track.

<i>Ayoko sana na ikaw ay mawawala</i>	I was hoping you wouldn't disappear
<i>Mawawasak lamang ang aking mundo</i>	For that will ruin my life
<i>Ngunit anong magagawa</i>	But what can I do
<i>Kung talagang ayaw mo na</i>	If you really don't want it anymore
<i>Sino ba naman ako para pigilin ka?</i>	Who am I to stop you?
<i>Lumayo ka man ay maiinwan</i>	Though you've distanced yourself
<i>Ang bakas ng ating pagmamabalan</i>	You've left behind traces of our love
<i>Ang awiting ito ay alaala</i>	This song is a reminder
<i>Na hindi kita malilimutan</i>	That I won't forget you

⁷⁶ A recording of the song can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl4pXRO-JqUI>.

<i>Pagka't ikaw ang tanging laman</i>	Because only you
<i>Ng aking mundo</i>	Complete my world
<i>Ng aking puso</i>	My heart
<i>Ng aking buhay</i>	My life ⁷⁷

These three introductory verses establish the song's themes of longing and heartbreak, subjects typically featured in sentimental ballads. Yet aside from sharing the genre's thematic tropes, "Halik" did not sound like any of the ballads in the Filipino popular music scene of that time, which tended to feature gentler opening notes and more restrained beats that slowly unfurl into the chorus. As an example, Sharon Cuneta's song "Mr. DJ", one of the most popular Filipino ballads in the 1980s, maintains a slow tempo and a subdued melody throughout the entire track. In contrast, Juliet's vocals on "Halik" open with mournful yelling over lush instrumentation. In an interview, Juliet reflected on the song's forceful opening: "We wanted to stun our audience right from the first notes. I'm almost screaming like a crazy person in these lines. That's intentional, because we wanted to tell everybody, 'Hello! Here we are. We are Aegis. Listen up.' Sometimes you have to scream out loud to get the whole room to pay attention" (personal communication, 9 March 2017). The band certainly made a striking first impression for audiences that had never heard a Filipino song opening with such vigorous vocals. Moreover, in likening her vocal performance to the "screaming (of) a crazy person", Juliet acknowledges that Aegis's act intentionally features musical and presentational qualities that audiences may view as unusual.

⁷⁷ For the complete lyrics and translations of the three musical examples discussed in this chapter, see Appendix E on page 258.

The sound of lament in the first three verses of “Halik” continues in its chorus, as Mercy joins in the performance. With their rich and husky alto, both sisters possess remarkable vocal endurance, firing harsh notes one after another with resonance. The raspy texture of their voices only increases in the chorus and the refrain that follows, which is repeated once immediately afterwards. The lyrics are again marked below to signify the usage of growling by the singers.

<i>Ang halik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Ang halik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?
<i>Nasasaktan ako, oh baby!</i>	I am hurt, oh baby!
<i>Sa tawing nakikita ka</i>	Every time I see you
<i>Naninibugho ako, oh baby!</i>	I am jealous, oh baby!
<i>Pag may kasama kang iba</i>	When you’re with someone else

As the song progresses, Juliet and Mercy’s combined vocals continue to intensify. In the closing seconds of the track, Juliet sings the chorus for a final time, sustaining the last syllable for about eight seconds (see example 2) without wavering in pitch or tone. It is a showcase which, whenever performed live, has consistently left audiences astonished — both for the vocalist’s impressive skills and the rarity of such a long and powerful melisma in the Philippine music industry, particularly during the 1990s. Indeed, while such formidable vocal techniques were showcased by the contestants of *Birit Baby* on *Eat Bulaga!*, Aegis’s melismatic runs were simply more intense and dragged out.



Example 2. Closing line of “Halik”.

The growl is a type of extended vocal technique typically associated with singers from the musical genres of heavy, thrash, and death metal. An abrasive style is used to highlight a song’s dark subject matter. While intended to evoke feelings of chaos or misery on the part of a song’s protagonist, the growl has also been a technique commonly utilised by singers to stimulate and galvanise their audience. Aegis’s extensive usage of growling in their recordings, particularly those from their debut album, comes across as a strategy to stand out in a local music industry unaccustomed to such a severe vocal style, in the same manner that *Eat Bulaga!* attracted viewers through original segments that had never been witnessed on Philippine television.

Aegis also emulated several elements from the variety programme’s foregrounding of humour in musical performance, such as the usage of over-the-top facial and physical gestures, or the cracking of jokes (to both their co-band members and the live audience) during performances and concerts. On Aegis’s Wikipedia page, their music is classified under the genres of heavy metal, hard rock, blues, and “novelty”, a category referring to songs performed principally for their comical effect. Bassist Rowena Pinpin said in an interview that although they agree with these labels assigned to their work, they consider their songs as pop ballads: “Sure, we sound metal, we sound rock, but first and foremost we think of ourselves as a pop, pop-rock band that sings emotional ballads.” Asked how their music fits within the “novelty” genre, Pinpin responded, “Maybe be-

cause we entertain (...) we make our fans happy. Our songs may be really heartbreaking, but we don't make our audiences cry. They listen to us and they're happy, they're smiling" (personal communication, 8 March 2017). Having observed and interviewed several of their supporters, I attest to Pinpin's impression that regardless of the band's tearful thematic content, audiences respond to their performances with cheerful delight. This is due to Aegis's unique musical style that combines both melodrama and parody: in their songs, the themes of longing and desperation are overly emphasised through lyrics that are dramatic to the point that they are amusing, such as the opening lines of "Halik": "*Ayoko sana na ikaw ay mawawala / Mawawasak lamang ang aking mundo* (I was hoping you wouldn't disappear / For that will ruin my life)."

The utterance of the English phrase "Oh baby!" in the song's refrain is also a device that tickles the audience due to its unexpected inclusion in a Tagalog track. As the protagonist exclaims her pain during the track's emotional climax, the curious use of "Oh baby!" introduces a hysterical, even silly, quality to the overall mood and tone of "Halik". Composer Celso Abenoja said that the band's vocalists added the English words during the recording of the track: "I remember we were in the studio and Juliet and Mercy were rehearsing the song. During a break, they joked around and added 'Oh baby!' to the lyrics. We were laughing about it until we realised it actually sounded very catchy, so we kept it in. Today, many fans consider it as one of their most favourite lines by Aegis" (personal communication, 3 April 2017). That the band, at the outset, found the inclusion of the phrase humorous shows that the song was not entirely intended to be a typical tear-jerker ballad, but rather an exaggerated version of one. The Sunot sisters corroborated with Celso's story and said that the song "Halik" was meant to portray the anguish of a heartbroken individual, albeit with embellished theatricality. Juliet said:

“For our first album, we wanted to showcase the power of our voices. (...) to impress our producers and the listeners out there. So we really exaggerated and gave it our all — from the melodramatic lyrics to the way we performed the song. In our music, in our performances, we’re not making fun of the heartbroken, but we’re amplifying, we’re dramatising their emotions. (...) Sometimes that can be really amusing, it can be really funny” (personal communication, 12 April 2017).

Examining the different kinds of laughter in English literary texts, Manfred Pfister lists that laughter can be: “merry or bitter, conciliatory or aggressive, disarming or provocative, pathological or remedial, foolish or wise, salacious or anguished, excessive or muted, scoffing or rollicking” (2002, 5). I would add that laughter can be a combination of two or more of these classifications, existing side by side, as in the case of the members of Aegis’s audience who — despite often being collectively tagged as one homogenous mass — display varying degrees and qualities of laughter while watching the same performance, with their reactions rooted in their diverse identities, motivations, and interpretations. Furthermore, the laughs generated by the band’s musical spectacle have often been deliberately enacted by their vocalists, but also occasionally in an unconscious manner; for instance, through unexpected vocal or physical gestures.

Similar to an earlier consideration of *Eat Bulaga!*’s musical entertainment as a form of subversion, we can view Aegis’s act as one that has allowed the public to escape from norms concerning hierarchies of taste, class, and culture. The band’s unorthodox style has provided audiences a liminal space where they are free to indulge in — and indeed to laugh at — a type of absurd entertainment that does not conform to established traditions in the country’s music industry, particularly the tendency for producers and

aspiring singers to merely replicate the content and style of romantic pop ballads from the West. Moreover, the audience's laughter can be interpreted as a catalyst for distraction and recovery, whether from personal or collective plights. In the case of the band's fanbase during the early 1990s, their laughter may be viewed as the articulation of political anxieties or social repressions — as a type of release that is at the outset gleeful, but may also be derisive, defensive, and ultimately empowering. As one respondent, Virgie Ramos — who has been a fan of the band since the 1990s — told me in an interview at a live Aegis concert: “I am so happy whenever I see them and hear them sing. Right now, I feel like I have no problems in life. I'm just enjoying their performance and having fun with the rest of the fans here” (personal communication, 5 July 2017). Aegis's ability to bestow on its fanbase a sense of escapism through music and performance is similar to an earlier discussion of *Eat Bulaga!*'s audiences receiving momentary distraction from their realities through the show's comedic spectacles.

Aegis's distinctive musical brand embodied not only melodramatic tropes but also a form of parodying, indeed another adaptation from *Eat Bulaga!*'s content and style. The band adheres as well to the discussed definition of kitsch or baduy: their songs and performances exude garish sentimentality and melodrama. It is important to note how Aegis is particular to — rather than a generic element of — the New Manila Sound. The band did not simply replicate the content and tone featured on *Eat Bulaga!*'s *Birit Baby* segment in 1994. Going beyond the covering of songs of Western divas, they recorded their own original tracks in Filipino. Their acts of vocal exaggeration were not only rooted in melodrama, but also featured elements of humour, which were initially not featured on *Eat Bulaga!*'s contest for child singers. While the programme invented the term birit as a local translation of the Western melismatic vocal style, Aegis turned birit into an entire genre of pop-rock ballads that was uniquely theirs and uniquely Filipino — one that went on

to influence the local music industry, as will be discussed later. Furthermore, akin to *Eat Bulaga!*'s reception since the 1990s, some people from the elite classes consider the band's repertoire as tasteless entertainment — nonetheless they are enjoyed in a knowing manner by a large segment of Filipinos, particularly those from the lower classes.

As I explore in detail below, many of the band's supporters consider Aegis as a novelty act precisely because of their exaggerated styles. While *baduy* is generally a pejorative term in Filipino culture, Aegis do not consider it as a slight. As Mercy Sunot said, "We are *baduy* — what's wrong with *baduy*? We love *baduy*. (...) When you're called *baduy*, that means you're *masa* — that means the masses like you and support you, so what's wrong with that? Everyone in Aegis grew up poor — we're *masa*, that's why we can connect to our audience" (personal communication, 8 March 2017). Aside from the amateur performers that appeared on the musical competition segments on *Eat Bulaga!*, Aegis was one of the few music acts in the 1990s to be rooted in a working-class background.⁷⁸ They have taken pride in their humble roots and claim these as a basis for their mass appeal: that Aegis have an immediate connection with listeners even before they start to sing. "We're *masa*", furthermore, is a claim implying that the band members serve as a representative of the lower class in the music industry. Fans indeed championed Aegis not only for the band's novel entertainment act but also because they considered Aegis as one of them, precipitating a bond between artist and audience that transcends mere amusement — a point I examine in a later section concerning the group's impact on audiences.

Two other power ballads from Aegis's debut album embodied the kitsch musical brand that they adopted from *Eat Bulaga!*, then developed and pioneered in the popular

⁷⁸ Many of the most popular musicians in the Philippines during the 1980s and early 1990s — such as Sharon Cuneta, Kuh Ledesma, Martin Nievera, and Gary Valenciano — came from upper class backgrounds.

music industry during that decade. “Luha” (Tear) portrays the same themes of loss and longing depicted in the band’s first single “Halik”, yet it opens with calmer instrumentation, with Juliet’s voice accompanied by the slow strumming of Abenoja’s guitar.⁷⁹ The opening line, “*Akala ko ikaw ay akin* (I thought you were mine)”, introduces the track as a song of lamentation, the protagonist passionately mourning her heartbreak. In the second verse, Juliet’s vocals begin to sound grittier as she reflects on the indifference of her partner.

<i>Akala ko ikaw ay akin</i>	I thought you were mine
<i>Totoo sa aking paningin</i>	I thought I saw it
<i>Ngunit nang ikaw ay yakapin</i>	But when I came to embrace you
<i>Naglalabo sa dilim</i>	You disappeared in the dark
<i>Ninais kong mapalapit sa ‘yo</i>	I wanted to be closer to you
<i>Ninais kong malaman mo</i>	I wanted you to know
<i>Ang mga paghihirap ko</i>	All of my hardships
<i>Balewala lang sa ‘yo</i>	But they were nothing to you

These two verses are then followed by a pre-chorus, where the song’s intensity builds up. A sense of movement — in the progression from the opening verses to this pre-chorus — is evident in the way Juliet begins to sustain the notes at the end of each line, particularly the first and fourth, as if providing a taste of her forthcoming vocal showcase. The section ends on the dominant, then builds up to the actual chorus as it provides tension

⁷⁹ A recording of the song can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9h12LGd-V1E>.

both in Juliet's vocals and the song's dramatic story. The melody starts to move upwards and the instrumentation thickens, with the sound of Pinpin's bass increasing in prominence.

<i>Ikaw ay aking minahal</i>	I have loved you
<i>Kasama ko ang Maykapal</i>	God is my witness
<i>Ngunit ako pala'y naging isang bangal</i>	But turns out I'm a fool
<i>Naghabangad ng isang katulad mo</i>	For desiring someone like you

The smooth lyrical lines leap up to a climactic high note in the chorus, where the tension built up in the preceding sections is finally given a sense of release (see example 3).



Example 3. First line of the chorus of “Luha”.

Juliet wails all eight lines of the chorus, particularly the first, second, and fifth. The latter, in particular, features Juliet's loudest and most dramatic growl in the track and serves as the song's emotional peak. Featuring harsher, accented chords, the chorus is also punctuated by cymbal crashes that embody the band's exaggerated dramatisation in terms of both musical style and thematic content.

<i>Hindi ko na kailangan</i>	I don't need you anymore
<i>Umalis ka na sa aking harapan</i>	Leave me alone

<i>Damdamin ko sa 'yo</i>	My feelings for you
<i>Ngayon ay naglaho na</i>	Have now disappeared
<i>At ito ang 'yong tandaan</i>	And keep this in mind
<i>Ako'y masyadong nasaktan</i>	You hurt me terribly
<i>Pag-ibig at pagsuyo na kabit na sa luha</i>	My love and affection, even in tears
<i>Mababayaran mo</i>	You will pay for this

Simon Frith regarded power ballads as songs “of feeling bottled up and bursting out; musical, emotional, and sexual release somehow all equated” (2001, 101). The intensity of “Luha” indeed undergoes a continuous escalation — a musical “bursting out” — as the song progresses. The first chorus is followed by a verse, then a repetition of the earlier pre-chorus, and then the chorus once again. All throughout this second half, the vocals become grittier and the instrumentation louder. Juliet and Mercy growl even more words in the chorus. “Luha” then closes with an outro section, but while most pop songs during that time — particularly by Filipino acts — featured conclusions where the track’s energy dissipates, “Luha” ramps up the power even further. There is greater musical and emotional intensity particularly in the outro’s first verse, where the protagonist delivers the song’s most sentimental lines. Juliet’s gritty wailing feature until the final verse, particularly when she sings, “*Gulong ng buhay / Patuloy-tuloy sa pag-ikot* (The wheel of life / Will keep on spinning).” It is only in the song’s very last line that the band members gradually decelerate the tempo to signal the end of the piece. The line — “*Sana bukas nasa ibabaw naman* (I hope tomorrow I’ll be on top)” — is also the only part of the song that features a positive tone.

<i>Ayaw ko nang mangarap</i>	I don't want to hope anymore
<i>Ayaw ko nang tumingin</i>	I don't want to look anymore
<i>Ayaw ko nang manalamin</i>	I can't look at myself anymore
<i>Nasasaktan ang damdamin</i>	I will just hurt myself
<i>Gulong ng buhay</i>	The wheel of life
<i>Patuloy-tuloy sa pag-ikot</i>	Will keep on spinning
<i>Noon ako ay nasa ilalim</i>	I've always been at the bottom
<i>Bakit ngayon nasa ilalim pa rin?</i>	Why am I still here at the bottom?
<i>Gulong ng buhay</i>	The wheel of life
<i>Patuloy-tuloy sa pag-ikot</i>	Will keep on spinning
<i>Noon ako ay nasa ilalim</i>	I've always been at the bottom
<i>Sana bukas nasa ibabaw naman</i>	I hope tomorrow I'll be on top

Examining the history of power ballads in American popular music during the late twentieth century, David Metzger explains that the genre is defined by a musical formula based on escalating tension, typically expressed through textural changes in the instrumentation (2012). In “Luha”, amplified instruments play in the pre-chorus and only get louder as the chorus progresses. The outro section then continues to elicit moments of uplift intended to rouse the listener’s emotions. That said, the stirring power of Aegis’s songs, particularly in the case of “Luha”, is mostly due to the vocal performance of Juliet (and Mercy, who backs her up in the chorus). This was evident during the band’s concert held in Manila on 13 March 2017. Opening the show with a performance of “Luha”, Juliet’s voice ascended from the quiet introductory verses to the chorus, and then to the outro

through a gradual increase in dynamics, each more vigorous than the last. As the bass and drums provided a dynamic rhythmic accompaniment in the chorus, the singers showcased their elaborate birit and impassioned high notes.



Figure 13. Aegis, led by vocalists Juliet (foreground, right) and Mercy Sunot (second from the left), performing at a concert in Manila on 13 March 2017. Photograph by author.

This display of vocal prowess was accompanied by the Sunot sisters' melodramatic physical gestures, which also intensified as the song progressed. During the opening verses, they sung mostly looking down on the ground, introspective. In the pre-chorus, they started to become more expressive — particularly Mercy, who adopted a pained expression on her face throughout. As seen in fig. 13, she held one hand over her heart, as if it were aching, and sung: “*Ngunit ako pala’y naging isang bangal / Naghabangad ng isang katulad mo* (But turns out I’m a fool / For desiring someone like you).” When the chorus hit,

both Juliet and Mercy assumed more dynamic physical stances — swaying their arms in the air, pumping their fists up, banging their heads to the beat, and even briefly kneeling on the ground when they wailed: “*Ako’y masyadong nasaktan* (You hurt me terribly).” Their facial expressions turned from sorrowful to enraged, mimicking the marked shift in the song’s instrumentation and volume.

The audience responded to such theatricality with a curious variety of facial expressions. During the song’s softer opening verses, most audience members looked impassive. But when Juliet began to showcase the grit in her voice during the pre-chorus, they started to come alive, with several eyes widening and heads bobbing. In the passionate chorus, they cheered and applauded, some rising from their seats to sway to the beat or to pump their fists in the air, imitating the singers. When Juliet and Mercy knelt on the ground, several audience members showcased doleful facial expressions, while many others smiled and laughed. Juliet told me: “That’s really our goal ... the goal of our songs: to make you laugh and cry.”

Aegis’s songs of sorrow move their audience’s emotions, but the band’s overly dramatic performance style affect them in a different way: by yielding laughter. In this manner, Aegis follows *Eat Bulaga!*’s desire to engage its audience through doses of song-and-dance entertainment. This capacity to make audiences both laugh and cry is a hallmark trait of the New Manila Sound scene that emerged in the 1990s: the distinctly over-the-top attributes of its innovators — *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis — generated an unusual mixture of laughter and tears. Due to their popularity with the public, the New Manila Sound precipitated a redefinition of what most Filipino audiences consider as music and entertainment.

At their concert held in March of 2017, the band’s remarkable engagement of audiences was most apparent during their performance of “Basang-Basa Sa

Ulan” (Drenched in the Rain), the track that served as the finale of their two-hour show. Like “Halik” and “Luha”, the song comes from the band’s debut album in 1995 and remains as one of their most popular hits. In the track, the protagonist weeps over being alone amid pouring rain. Similar to the case of “Luha”, it adheres to the power ballad formula of constant escalation: tension is established on the opening verse, then it encounters a slight release in the first chorus, continues to build more tension in the next verse, and finally climaxes in the second iteration of the chorus. The vocal notes are sustained longer and the instrumentation more amplified and textured. Ringing guitar riffs, forceful drumming, and synthesiser licks colour the song’s rich sound.⁸⁰

During their live performances of the track since the 1990s, Aegis have adopted a call-and-response style that enjoins their audience to participate in the performance by singing along. During their concert in Manila, Juliet sung the four lines of the opening verse, then immediately turned the microphone to the direction of the audience, yelling: “O, *kayo naman!* (Now it’s your turn).” The audience responded by singing the entire chorus. Afterwards, Mercy took on the second verse, then again turned to the audience for the chorus. The track concluded with two repetitions of the chorus, where Juliet and Mercy duet; all throughout they motioned towards the audience to join in for a grand sing-along that involved the entire concert venue.

(Juliet)

Heto ako ngayon, nag-iisa

Here I am, alone

Naglalakbay sa gitna ng dilim

Journeying in the dark

⁸⁰ A recording of the song can be accessed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rjb0EP8Y_iE.

<i>Lagi na lang akong nadarapa</i>	I always fall down
<i>Ngunit beto, bumabangon pa rin</i>	But I stand up again

(Audience)

<i>Heto ako, basang-basa sa ulan</i>	Here I am, drenched in the drain
<i>Walang masisilungan, walang malalapitan</i>	With no shelter, no one to turn to
<i>Sana'y may luha pa, akong mailuluha</i>	I wish to have tears left to cry
<i>At ng mabawasan ang aking kalungkutan</i>	To ease my sorrows

(Mercy)

<i>Dumi at putik sa aking katawan</i>	Dirt and mud on my body
<i>Ihip ng hangin at katahimikan</i>	The wind and the silence
<i>Bawat patak ng ulan at ang lamig</i>	Every drop of rain and the cold
<i>Waring nag-uutos</i>	Commanding me
<i>Upang maglaho ang pag-ibig</i>	To let go of my love

(Juliet and Mercy, with the audience)

<i>Heto ako, basang-basa sa ulan</i>	Here I am, drenched in the drain
<i>Walang masisilungan, walang malalapitan</i>	With no shelter, no one to turn to
<i>Sana'y may luha pa, akong mailuluha</i>	I wish to have tears left to cry
<i>At ng mabawasan ang aking kalungkutan</i>	To ease my sorrows
<i>ang aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows
<i>ang aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows
<i>and aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows

In an interview, Mercy explained why they have consistently performed “Basang-Basa Sa Ulan” in such a manner, singing it alongside the audience and often as the finale of their live shows:

“This song is one of our big anthems — and it sounds beautiful when sung by a big crowd all at the same time. (...) Our fans can relate to the song’s message — this is the anthem of anyone who has ever felt alone and isolated at one point in their lives. When we all sing it together, we no longer feel alone. That’s why we do it — we want to tell our fans that Aegis are here for you, and your fellow Aegis fans are here for you as well” (personal communication, 12 April 2017).

In enjoining their audiences to participate in a live singing of the track, Aegis implore their supporters to perform a shared affinity — both for the band and the themes depicted in their songs. Singing a melancholic ballad about being alone, along with fellow audience members, provides spectators the comfort of knowing that they belong to community bound together by a common fandom. Moreover, the song’s call-and-response style, soaring choruses, and rich instrumentation make it an ideal anthem performed by large groups in concert halls and stadiums.

During three Aegis concerts that I attended, I observed that the enthusiasm of audiences peaked when “Basang-Basa Sa Ulan” was performed. They seemed to delight in the opportunity to showcase their own birit renditions alongside their idols and fellow fans. While many audience members turned their mobile phone cameras towards the stage to capture photographs and videos of the band, several people also recorded themselves as they performed the track, imitating the Sunot sisters’ emotive facial and physical

gestures particularly during the melismatic sections of the song. In their act of mimicry, fans appeared to relish performing like their beloved stars; at the same time, Aegis took pleasure in affording their supporters the opportunity to do so. This projection of interactivity, one initially associated with *Eat Bulaga!*, onto an aesthetics of live performance represents a significant break with the traditional performance network.

A distinct Aegis identity

Thus far, I have examined select tracks from Aegis's debut album to show how their power ballads embodied melodramatic emotions, forceful musical vocals and instrumentation, and performance gestures that engaged audiences like no other Filipino music act before them. In this section, I explore the novel parody aspect of their musical act, particularly their birit performing style which serves as the core component of the low-brow musical culture that they adapted from *Eat Bulaga!* and continue to promote today. As I shall show, Aegis performed a type of exaggerated vocal that adapted and amplified attributes from both traditional Filipino music and Western acts. Aside from parodying the repertoires of Western divas and rock bands, they also disrupted two major aspects of the Philippine music industry during that decade: the serious themes of the protest songs that dominated the industry and the popular local singers who were content with replicating the smooth and saccharine ballads of foreign musicians.

Adapting the melismatic singing of Western acts such as Houston and Air Supply, Aegis did not simply imitate their powerful vocal styles. Invoking Roland Robertson's notion of glocalisation (1995) — in reference to global popular commodities that have been tailored to suit specific tastes within a particular local — Aegis adapted the power ballads from the West that were already popular to Filipino listeners, but made the genre their own through their exaggerated birit and an overly dramatised live performance

style. Audiences that encountered Aegis for the first time, therefore, found elements in their performance that were both familiar (as in, the Western power ballad sound) and novel (Aegis's flourish).⁸¹

Moreover, Aegis's power ballads were not direct imitations of their Western counterparts because the band incorporated musical elements from a genre of traditional Filipino-language ballads, the *kundiman*, which became popular during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Often performed as a serenade song, the *kundiman* featured smooth and flowing rhythms, lyrical melodic lines, and accompaniment by an acoustic guitar. These ballads were part and parcel of a wider nationalist movement that aimed to promote Filipino-language songs during the Spanish and American colonial eras. For many of these compositions, the undying love expressed in the lyrics were dedicated not only to a romantic subject or partner, but also to the Philippine nation. The *kundiman* thus embodied veiled patriotism during times of colonial oppression (Hila 1994, 19).

Aegis's manager Celso Abenoja explained how his compositions for the band's debut album were inspired not only by Western power ballads, but also by the *kundiman*:

“The *kundiman* songs were so passionate and so romantic (...) but they were also slow and often very soft. I wanted Aegis's songs to reflect the same romantic emotions of the *kundiman*, but with a twist that made the band stand out. With the help of our singers and instrumentalists, we came up with the

⁸¹ A similar case of musical adaptation in the Asian region is exemplified by the Japanese *enka*, a genre of sentimental pop ballads considered to resemble the stylistic qualities of traditional Japanese music. Enka singers also typically employ a style of melismatic vocal performance known as *kobushi*, which occurs when the pitch of the singer's voice fluctuates irregularly within one scale degree. Enka's popularity among younger Japanese audiences increased in the first decade of the twentieth century (see Martin 2008 and Yano 2003).

idea of exaggerating the songs. (...) These tracks may start out sounding like a kundiman, but then they turn into something uniquely Aegis” (personal communication, 17 March 2017).

The band’s intention, it appears, was to draw listeners in with the familiar sound of the kundiman, and then take them to an unfamiliar musical direction that would delight them. A survey of the most popular kundiman songs from the 1880s to the 1950s — including those by Ric Manrique Jr., Sylvia La Torre, Cenon Lagman, and Conching Rosal, the genre’s most notable acts — shows that male performers barely used melismatic vocals, while the female singers occasionally did so. In particular, La Torre, who was dubbed the “Queen of Kundiman” in the 1940s, was fond of singing melismas at the end of verses (see, for example, her album *Kung Kita’y Kapiling* [If I’m With You], 1956). But she did so sparingly and gently, with barely any flourish. While Aegis’s songs indeed reflected the tender emotions of the kundiman — drawing in audiences through their expressions of intimacy — they also featured elaborate melismas, faster tempos, richer harmonies, and larger emotional swells. Aegis turned the kundiman into something more ecstatic and, thus, something that was uniquely theirs.

Aegis did more than merely tailor attributes from traditional Filipino serenades and Western power ballads to create their own brand of sound. When I asked the band how they would describe their songs to someone who had never heard of them before, Mercy Sunot responded, “They’re Celine Dion, they’re Whitney Houston, they’re kundiman, but in an Aegis way.” The “Aegis way”, the band members elaborated, referred to their novel interpretation of what a ballad sounds like and how it should be performed. As Rowena Pinpin put it: “We are not just copying styles but creating our own Filipino pop ballad” (personal communication, 8 March 2017). Aegis’s ballad places the heartfelt

and sombre qualities of both the *kundiman* and the Western power ballad into the context of highly ornate vocal and physical gestures. The band's vocalists growl and wail melodramatic lyrics, but they do so while smiling and winking to a chuckling audience. Furthermore, it is notable that Aegis do acknowledge that their act is influenced by the work of other musicians. At the same time, they stress that their adaptation turns existing musical styles into a genre and performance that are uniquely theirs. This insistence on the distinctiveness of their ballad can be construed as Aegis upholding their oeuvre as disparate from the typical Filipino songs that were produced during the 1980s and early 1990s, most of which were obvious imitations of Western pop music.

The comedic aspect of Aegis's act brings into fore the notion of parody. The hallmark of Aegis's musical performance — the *birit* style — is a form of parodying, following J. Peter Burkholder's definition that musical parody typically possesses humorous intent and entails the placing of familiar musical ideas or lyrics into an incongruous context (Grove Music Online). In the case of Aegis's exaggerated act, they utilise powerful vocal runs popularised by Western acts in order to elicit amusement and awe from audiences, playfully distorting the musical ideas of the conventional power ballad. The band, however, contend that their performance is a type of "parody not meant to hurt or make fun of anybody", as Juliet Sunot described it. Their vocal and physical performances are not intended to directly ridicule any of the *kundiman* singers and Western divas or rock bands of the power ballad genre. Rather, Aegis adapt their familiar musical style and perform it in an unconventional manner that ends up surprising audiences. Juliet added: "It's all for entertainment" (personal communication, 9 March 2017). These statements echo earlier assertions by the producers and presenters of *Eat Bulaga!*, who claimed that their musical impersonation contests and sketch comedy segments were intended as "harmless spoofs". Parody by way of physical comedy and exaggeration was

truly a core element of the New Manila Sound. Both *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis pioneered — and continue to promote — this type of kitsch musical performance that entertained audiences and showcased the talents of their performers.

But there is more to Aegis's act than the parodying qualities of their performance — one that goes beyond the tradition they adopted from *Eat Bulaga!*'s kitsch spectacles. In intending for their melancholic songs to have a comedic effect on the audience, Aegis disrupted the prevailing musical genres that dominated the Philippine music industry during the 1980s and early 1990s: serious protest and nationalistic anthems, and saccharine ballads that replicated the repertoires of foreign acts. In this manner, they rejected the trend of Filipino musicians (and audiences) content with songs that merely mimicked Western trends. Aegis also went against the then-widespread use of acoustic instruments in Filipino songs, and instead used instruments such as the bass guitar and drums to produce vigorous beats that accompanied their performance.

Furthermore, in exaggerating the vocal gestures of conventional pop songs during that time, Aegis rejected the shape of those songs. The basic shape of a typical Western ballad consists of a “steady expansion in the size of the ensemble and dynamics, which culminates in a closing passage based on the repetition of a rhythmic phrase” (Metzer 2012, 452). In contrast, most of Aegis's songs start out loudly and harshly, then slow down in the pre-chorus before rising quickly and steeply in the succeeding verses. Instead of winding down in the outro passage, their songs ramp up the power even further during multiple closing verses that allow for soaring vocal showcases.

Aegis adopted their stylistic trademark — twirling birit at the ends of musical phrases — from the singing competition segments of *Eat Bulaga!*. But they turned the birit into more than just a form of schtick or stunt that was used by amateur contestants to entertain viewers and win cash prizes. Instead, Aegis made the melismatic style the

main feature of their performance. As the first Philippine music act to record an album featuring this melismatic style, they were birit's foremost promoters during the 1990s. *Eat Bulaga!* aided in their rise to fame, frequently inviting the band to perform on the variety programme. In turn, Aegis's stardom made *Eat Bulaga!*'s birit contests even more popular. Director Poochie Rivera told me via email correspondence: "While birit was already featured on our show before Aegis released their songs, they were really the ones who made birit so popular to audiences. They turned it into this whole big genre! (...) Because of how successful they were, obviously we knew we had to feature more birit singers on the show, so we launched all these other contests for different ages," (personal communication, 21 May 2018). As mentioned earlier, the show produced four birit singing competition segments aimed at contestants of varying ages and genders from 1998 to 2009: *Birit Queen* (1997, 2004-2006), *Birit Baby* (1994-1999, 2009), *Birit Bagets* (2001-2003), and *Birit King* (2004, 2007). Aegis's songs were also occasionally covered by contestants on the show's other talent contests such as *Music Maestro* (1997), which featured covers of Filipino songs, and *O... Diva?* (1999-2000), another birit competition featuring impersonations of local music acts.

At the turn of the century, Aegis went on to record two more albums featuring their signature birit ballads, produced once again by Alpha Records: *Mahal na Mahal Kita* (I Love You Very Much) in 1999 and *Awit at Pag-Ibig* (Song and Love) in 2001. They also produced a special holiday record, *Paskung-Pasko* (It's Christmas) in 2000, featuring up-tempo Christmas songs. All three albums generated chart-topping hits, though they did not sell as many copies as the band's debut album. In 2003, the band decided to take a break from their birit sound and try their hand at musical styles deemed more conventional in Philippine music. They released an album titled *Muling Balikan* (Return Once More), featuring 11 covers of classic Filipino songs such as "Bayan Ko" (My Country), a

patriotic kundiman that was composed during the American occupation and then regained popularity during Marcos's dictatorship. The rest of the album comprised of covers of folk-pop ballads, including Freddie Aguilar's 1979 song "Bulag, Pipi, at Bingi" (Blind, Mute, and Deaf) and Roel Cortez's 1985 track "Baleleng". None of the songs featured Aegis's birit sound. The album was not as successful as the band's earlier releases and prompted a lukewarm reaction from their fans, who had expected Aegis's signature sound. Juliet Sunot described the album, and their decision to give their birit style a break, as "a flop".

Aegis did not produce another album until 2006, when they released their best-selling record to date: *Aegis Greatest Hits*, which featured 20 of their most popular songs, led by "Halik", "Luha", and "Basang-Basa Sa Ulan", the album's first three tracks. The band explained that after the disappointing performance of their 2003 covers album, they decided to focus on singing their biggest birit hits. Stella Pabico told me:

"During our gigs, our fans only want to hear the same songs from our first three albums. Whenever we'd sing covers — whether they're of American or Filipino songs — the fans don't respond as well as they do when we sing "Halik" or "Luha". They get bored. They come to see us for "Halik" and "Luha". (...) So we thought, you know what, why complicate things? Why complicate things for us? It's difficult to write and record new songs, you know. (...) So let's just give the fans what they want" (personal communication, 17 March 2017).

Pabico's statement conveys a realisation that Aegis's success with audiences lies in their birit style; that their supporters find the band's birit as the most compelling facet of their

identity and act. It also indicates a priority to satisfy their audience, an eagerness to “give the fans what they want” — even if those desires conflict with the band’s choices — again echoing a line repeatedly uttered by the producers and stars of *Eat Bulaga!* concerning the content they present to viewers.

It was only eight years later, in 2014, that Aegis released another album, titled *Aegis Greatest Hits, Vol. 2* — another compilation record comprised of 21 of their old birit ballads. Though they have not released any new music since 2001, the band have earned a living by performing in shows across the country and around the world for their overseas Filipino fans — a matter that will be discussed in detail later. In the next section, I further explore Aegis’s effect on audiences and the popular music industry during the 1990s, focusing on how the band’s birit sound influenced the taste and musical preferences of Filipinos. Based on interviews, I also examine how several longtime supporters interpret Aegis’s novelty act and discuss what draws them to support the band.

Aegis’s cultural impact

The popularity of Aegis motivated many aspiring singers and bands in the late 1990s to emulate the band’s birit style. On *Eat Bulaga!* and its rival musical variety shows, there was a surge of contestants who performed ballads by performing elaborate strings of notes to showcase their vocal power. As an illustrative example, in 2002, the television network IBC produced a reality singing programme titled *Star for a Night*, based on the British tal-

ent series of the same name.⁸² After multiple rounds of competition that lasted an entire year, the show’s final episode featured 11 contestants, nine of whom sung power ballads throughout the contest; the other two performed softer acoustic love songs. The show’s winner, 14-year-old Sarah Geronimo, stood out with her extensive octave range and emotive melismatic runs. During the show’s elimination rounds, she performed Aegis’s “Halik” and “Basang-Basa Sa Ulan” and credited the band as a primary influence. Today, Geronimo is one of the biggest music superstars in the country. During her concerts, she often performs covers of Aegis’s songs, aside from her original tracks. In recent years, Geronimo has also served as a judge and mentor on the reality singing programme *The Voice of the Philippines*. She has shown a preference for contestants who perform birit ballads, like in the case of 9-year-old Lyca Gairanod: auditioning in 2014 with a cover of “Halik”, she went on to reach the final round, where she performed “Basang-Basa Sa Ulan” alongside Aegis, who made a special appearance. Gairanod won the competition and then released a chart-topping album comprised of original power ballads. Indeed, looking at the profiles, performance techniques, and repertoires of most winners of local singing competitions, it can be surmised that adapting the birit style has been a significant — if not essential — factor to their success with judging panels and the voting public. In an interview, Rose Sazon, a former producer on *The Voice*, reiterated this point, dubbing Aegis’s songs as “*pang-contest*” (suitable or preferred for such contests) because they allow for vocal showcases that make for dazzling moments on television. Reflecting on Aegis’s influence on the music industry, Sazon said:

⁸² *Star for a Night* was only the third standalone singing programme of its kind in the Philippines that aired on its own time slot and not merely as a segment on a musical variety show, like most of the other singing contests on Philippine television during that time. The first was *Tawag ng Tanghalan* (Call of the Stage), which ran from the 1950s to the 1970s, followed by *Ang Bagong Kampeon* (The New Champion), which aired from 1985 to 1988.

“You want to do well in these singing contests? Make sure you sing birit. Look at all the past winners in the last two decades — they’re all *biriteros* and *biriteras*. (...) It’s what the judges love, it’s what the audiences love, it’s what the recording companies look for. (...) Of course, Aegis started this whole trend that continues until today. You have to be O.A. [over-acting] like them. Birit to the max. (...) As you know, they give it their all. They bring out the drama every time and that’s what people respond to” (personal communication, 8 August 2017).

Aegis’s act has indeed been so popular to the point that it has shaped the Filipino audience’s views on what constitutes as musical entertainment. They have even influenced the criteria by which judges and viewers of singing competitions assess contestants. Given that many of the country’s most popular singers today are products of talent shows on television, Aegis’s influence has extended to the pop music industry and the type of acts that get signed by recording companies, as well as the genre of songs that they perform. The result is a domination by the birit of the country’s popular culture, one that will endure as long as Aegis remain popular — and until the musicians that they have influenced continue to reproduce their unique style and sound.

Sazon’s point about Aegis “giving it their all” during every performance echoes remarks from audience members I interviewed. At an Aegis concert held in Manila in August of 2017, I met Virgie Ramos, a 46-year-old nurse who has been a fan since the 1990s. Asked what she liked the most about Aegis, she responded: “They put on a show every time — with their big voices, their big birit” (personal communication, 5 July 2017). This substantiates previous claims that the support of Aegis’s fanbase is rooted in

their melismatic style; that audiences come to live concerts to be entertained by the band's tremendous vocal performance. Jason Salazar, a 39-year-old call centre representative, told me that while many singers have tried to emulate Aegis's sound, none of them have measured up to the intensity of the band's performances: "For me, they're the original. There's nobody like them. It's been over twenty years now and yet they still have the best voices. (...) 'Halik' is still the best Filipino pop song ever" (personal communication, 5 July 2017).

For their longtime supporters, the band's brand of entertainment has withstood the comings-and-goings of artists and trends in the music industry. That Aegis have been performing the same set of songs for over two decades — and can still fill hundreds of concert venues a year — attests to their remarkable appeal to the public. The band's drawing power, their fans told me, is rooted in their kitschy act. "They can make you smile and cry" was a statement I heard from many supporters, in reference to the intersection of comedic and melodramatic elements in Aegis's performances. It is similar to views from the fans of *Eat Bulaga!* — that the performers on the musical variety programme entertained them through laughter and tears — indicating that such convergence of humour and drama is a distinctive feature of the musical culture that *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis have pioneered since the 1990s.

Notably, all of the two dozen fans I met acknowledged the intentionally excessive and garish qualities of Aegis's act. Arthur Mañosca, a 34-year-old office assistant, told me: "Aegis emote and exaggerate to the point that sometimes it's silly, but that's what I like about them. I know some people don't get it — they think it's corny or over-the-top, or that their fans are baduy — but I don't care. (...) I think that's exactly what makes Aegis so special to me, and so different from every other band out there" (personal communication, 28 March 2017). Mañosca's statement, which was echoed by many other

fans, shows a recognition on the part of Aegis's fanbase that the band deliver a type of musical entertainment that is considered by others as excessive and unrefined. In spite of that, their supporters believe that the absurdity of Aegis's act is precisely what makes the band exceptional. Their distinct performance, which only they can deliver, is what audiences show up for. Aegis created such demand — and remains to be the only group that can fulfil it, given the relative superiority and appeal of their vocal prowess when compared to the other local music acts that they have influenced.

Invoking once again Herzfeld's notion of cultural intimacy (2016), longtime supporters recognise that aspects of Aegis's identity and style are considered a source of embarrassment for some individuals. Nevertheless, they provide fans with feelings of common sociality. Indeed, some of the band's supporters pointed out how they delighted in expressing their fandom alongside large communities of audiences. At concerts, I met multiple fan groups that have been watching Aegis's performances together for years. Aurora Bartoleme, a 30-year-old housewife, told me she has been attending shows with the same group of five women since 2005, after first meeting at an Aegis concert. Similar to the case of *Eat Bulaga!*, Aegis have served as a vehicle for social collectivity by bringing their supporters together through a shared fandom.

Furthermore, for several fans Aegis's songs and performances have served as a means of distraction — a form of impact that the band are cognisant of. Juliet Sunot said, "The world is so serious — during the dictatorship, and back in the 1980s, and up to today — and all we want to do is make people happy. Sometimes people respond to our music by laughing because they enjoy our birit, while others respond by tearing up because they can relate to the song's theme of heartbreak" (personal communication, 13 March 2017). Akin once more to *Eat Bulaga!*'s case, Aegis intended for their musical act to divert the minds of audiences from the sombre mood of the country, particularly

post-Martial Law. As they explained, the parody aspects of their performance, such as their exaggerated vocal and physical gestures, are deliberate acts intended to be interpreted by audiences as comical; Aegis knowingly ridicule themselves for the sake of amusing the public. This “gleeful self-humiliation” is another trademark of the New Manila Sound’s musical culture.

The issue of class representation also often came up as a basis for the support Aegis have received from their fanbase. Many audience members told me that they have championed Aegis because they consider the band as one of them. Jacqui Espinosa, a 52-year-old hair stylist, told me: “They’re masa. Aegis represent the masa. They look like us. They came from the same backgrounds” (personal communication, 8 March 2017). Espinosa went on to describe Aegis’s music as the “*tunog ng masa*” (the sound of the masses) — a description that Aegis’s members and producers revelled in. Stella Pabico said, “We’re not as beautiful or glamorous as other actors and singers in the industry. But the fact that our fans, the masa, know that we represent them — that’s enough. Because yes, we are masa. (...) So it makes us very happy to know that we are the *tunog ng masa*” (personal communication, 17 March 2017). In designating Aegis’s music as the sound of the masses, audiences claim that the band’s birit ballads represent the tastes of the lower classes of Philippine society: that birit is their sound. Effectively, this designates other types of musical traditions in the country — such as classical music, nationalistic songs, and Western or Western-inspired pop music — as not representative of the preferences of the masses. Furthermore, I assert that part of Aegis’s “masa” appeal is that aside from sharing a lower-class background with their enduring fanbase, they serve as aspirational figures to the audience, who may deem the band’s climb to stardom as an inspiring example. The members of Aegis have presented themselves as relatable idols: vocalists Juliet and Mercy Sunot are definitely not your typical karaoke singers, but rather artists with

a clear control of their higher register and a proficient understanding of microphone usage and amplification — factors that are key to pulling off their extreme birit tracks. Yet they have managed to maintain their masa branding after all these years through particular presentational qualities, such as wearing relatively simple attire during their performances (especially when compared to the ostentatious clothing of modern pop stars, both local and foreign) or occasionally cracking jokes concerning their humble upbringing.

The dominance of Aegis's music in the lower classes can easily be perceived by walking around public spaces in Manila. In markets and shopping centres, their songs can often be heard over audio speakers of varying sizes. Inside public transportation vehicles such as jeepneys and buses, drivers and passengers go through their day humming alongside the band's ballads. Jigger Mejia, a former executive at a recording company that rivalled Aegis's producers in the 1990s, told me in an email conversation: "Aegis's music is the soundtrack of the ordinary Filipino's everyday life. They reflect the joys and sorrows of the everyman" (personal communication, 10 August 2017). Owing to Aegis's lower-class upbringing, Mejia views the band as an authentic representative of the "everyman" in Filipino society. Since the lower classes comprise a vast majority of the Filipino population, this implies that Aegis embody *Filipino-ness* through their music. Georgina Born writes, "It is precisely music's extraordinary powers of imaginary evocation of identity and of cross-cultural and intersubjective empathy that render it a primary means of both marking and transforming individual and collective identities" (2000, 32). As Aegis's songs are habitually played and performed in public and private spaces around the country, their music has functioned as the soundtrack of Filipinos — a testament to the ability of music to reflect and realise identities. Music's status as a frequent collective activity,

and its potential to comprise various meanings and references, indeed allows it to potentially shape the sentiments of a mass audience, as demonstrated by this case study.

Criticism of Aegis

Not all sectors of society, however, regarded Aegis as representative of their identities: similar to how some individuals belonging to the upper classes viewed *Eat Bulaga!* during the 1990s, the popular press and officials of state-owned cultural agencies considered Aegis in a negative light. For instance, Aegis did not receive substantial coverage in newspapers during the 1990s. A longtime editor of the country's most-read paper, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, told me in an online interview that he remembers several instances when reporters had pitched to write stories about Aegis's fame and reviews of their music. But editors routinely turned down these proposed stories because "Aegis wasn't considered legitimate music", according to my informant, who requested anonymity. Instead, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and the rest of the country's newspapers routinely published stories about the classical and folk music programmes, as well as theatrical productions, organised at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. The limited press coverage of popular music was dominated by reports on American musicians and a handful of Filipino singer-songwriters who performed nationalistic songs or soft ballads. Their selection of which musicians and musical events to feature was indicative of what, to them, constituted as "legitimate" forms of music.

Looking through accessible archives of articles published by major Philippine newspapers in the 1990s, I found only seven pieces that made mention of Aegis. Six of which were brief announcements published by the *Philippine Star* about the band's forthcoming concerts, while the seventh was a 210-word essay that appeared with no author's byline and was published on the weekend culture section of the *Manila Bulletin* on 23

September 1998. While the article acknowledged Aegis's widespread popularity, it dismissed the band's birit ballads as a form of tasteless entertainment: "Their songs are a display of oversinging. The screeching voices of their lead singers are extremely inelegant, and has encouraged others to think that is music. It is not. They clearly have the aptitude for singing, so they should rethink their approach if they aim to leave a mark." While recognising Aegis's vocal talent, this critique denounces Aegis's work as not befitting the status of music when compared with Western ensembles and other local singers during that time, particularly the classical and folk-pop performers. It underscores the extent to which the band's performance style deviated from the accepted norms in the music industry.

The article went on to reprimand "radio jockeys and TV producers who keep promoting" Aegis by playing their music over their stations or inviting the band to perform in their programmes, such as *Eat Bulaga!*. "This is not music — it is noise pollution. For the sake of our culture, stop," concluded the article, implying that Aegis's type of entertainment was not only garish, but also harmful to audiences and the country's cultural traditions. Similar to critiques of *Eat Bulaga!* and the variety show's supposed "vulgarity", Aegis's lowbrow musical culture based on parody and exaggeration — and its popularity with Filipino audiences — was so widespread during the 1990s that they engendered accusations that the band's music corrupted the taste of Filipinos and the quality of the culture at large. As they witnessed the devotion that Aegis received, many from the elite class were upset that audiences preferred the band's kitsch act over artists (both local and foreign) that cultural figures and the press deemed and promoted as quality musical entertainment. They found it difficult, for instance, to comprehend how Aegis's melodramatic ballads suddenly commanded more attention than the era's folksy protest anthems that carried serious social messages.

They may have also been threatened by Aegis's working-class background and their status as a band of the masses, as music producer Jigger Mejia explained: "Most, if not all, of the popular singers and bands during that time came from the upper or upper-middle class, like Sharon Cuneta, Gary Valenciano, the APO Hiking Society. Suddenly, here comes Aegis, who grew up poor, and they capture the attention of the masa. I think everyone in the industry were scared of Aegis because they represented the majority with their music" (personal communication, 10 August 2017). Mejia's statement implies that the critics of Aegis were probably alarmed that they were losing their control over dictating to the masses what counted as official or legitimate culture — and which works and products were worth partaking. Aegis's birit act, after all, was not only replacing the genre of sweet-sounding ballads in terms of popularity, but was also influencing other up-and-coming performers to emulate their birit style in order to attract audiences.

Another major criticism of Aegis during that decade was that the band did not embody Filipino culture or identity because their songs were not representative of Filipino music — or at least what the elites considered as such. A former employee at the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, who also requested not to be identified by name, told me that she and most of her colleagues at the country's official and government-run council viewed Aegis as "merely a fad" and "not real Filipino culture". She refuses, until today, to recognise the band's popularity and legacy in the music industry, saying that she has not heard of any of their songs or concerts since the 1990s. Asked which local musicians from that decade she considers as most important, she named the choral group Philippine Madrigal Singers, the composer Ryan Cayabyab, and the singer Jose Mari Chan, who is most known for his English-language ballads from the late 1980s. Her remarks reflect either a marked difference between the culture experienced by the upper and lower classes, or the respondent's effort to turn a blind eye, and a deaf ear,

towards Aegis. For some audience members, they indeed indicated their unfavourable sentiment towards Aegis by ignoring altogether the band's significance and legacy.

According to the members of Aegis, they are aware of the negative perceptions their act has engendered. Juliet Sunot told me:

“We used to be affected by their criticisms, especially when we were starting out. A lot of people thought we were cheap or that we were too loud or vulgar. But we just continued to do what we came here to do, which is to entertain people. To us, the important thing is that the masses love us and our music. As long as we have the masses, we feel good” (personal communication, 9 March 2017).

For the band, they obtain validation of their work from audiences that have supported them throughout their two-decade career. They have decided to focus on their remarkable success with most lower-class audiences instead of the generally negative reception from upper-class Filipinos. The polarised responses that Aegis received during their early years manifests the unusualness and distinctiveness of their performance: it was unlike anything audiences and critics had seen, with many entertained by its novelty, while several others were put off by its apparent deviancy.

Chapter Five

The Resurgence of Aegis

An enduring fandom: online, offline, overseas

Despite not releasing any new original music since 2001, Aegis have remained popular with Filipino audiences. Their regular and numerous live concerts, where their sets have consistently been comprised of songs from their debut album, have sustained their stardom in the entertainment industry. Digital technology has also played a pivotal part in their continued success. In recent years, the band and their managers have maintained an official page on Facebook, where they post daily updates for their fans — such as performance videos, behind-the-scenes photographs, and concert announcements.⁸³ The band members also told me that they occasionally log on to the page to personally respond to messages from their supporters. Aegis’s Facebook page has garnered over 630,000 followers as of June 2018; there are also over a dozen other unofficial, fan-made Facebook pages named after the band.

Although the group does not maintain an official channel on YouTube, there are thousands of Aegis-related videos that have been uploaded on the website. Many of them do not feature any actual video clips, but merely audio recordings of the band’s tracks, and “lyric videos” where viewers can sing along as a song’s lyrics flash on the screen. There are also thousands of uploaded videos filmed from Aegis’s concert performances, as well as clips from their appearances on television programmes such as *Eat*

⁸³ Aegis’s official Facebook page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/aegisband>.

Bulaga! The two most popular Aegis-related videos on YouTube feature 80-minute audio recordings of the band's biggest hits. A video titled "Aegis — Nonstop Music" features 20 of their songs; uploaded on March 2015, it has garnered close to 18 million views. The second video, titled "Aegis Greatest Hits Songs (Full Album)", is an uploaded copy of their 2006 album. It was posted in September 2013 and has been streamed 15 million times. Both videos have generated close to 6,000 combined comments from users, most of whom expressed their admiration and devotion towards the band. In these comments, "walang kupas" (timeless) was a phrase often used by fans to describe Aegis and their music. One top-ranked comment, posted by a user named Bryan J., read: "I grew up with these songs, but until today, no matter how many times I've heard them, I never get tired of listening to them! True emotions!" Another user, named Skie Aidnac, wrote: "They are the epitome of excellent singers."⁸⁴ These comments reinforce earlier points on how Aegis redefined what Filipinos considered as musical entertainment. Their impact in the country's popular culture has been so potent that audiences continue to champion them until today.

Social media websites have also enabled new and younger audiences to discover Aegis and their music. During three concerts that I attended, I met several fans who were under the age of 18 and were thus not yet born during Aegis's rise in the 1990s. Two sisters, MJ and Jerika, told me that they first heard Aegis's songs through their parents, and then they went on to discover more of the band's music and performances on YouTube. At another show, there was a nine-year-old boy seated alongside his parents, two grandparents, an aunt, and two older cousins. His father told me that the boy knew the words to some of Aegis's songs "since he hears them at home — because we play them on

⁸⁴ The videos can be accessed respectively at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNPvV8k-viQ> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tE9y0nP_2Y&t=1733s.

YouTube all the time” and that the boy finds the band’s soaring vocals and overly dramatic performances entertaining. For these audience members, their idolisation of Aegis has been passed onto younger family members, whose fandom is developed through their consumption of Aegis’s work through the internet.

YouTube has also provided a platform for individuals to showcase their cover performances featuring Aegis’s songs. One of the most popular videos is a 2013 cover duet of Aegis’s track “Sinta” (Darling) by a 27-year-old named Roadfill (real name Rodfil Obeso Macasero, one half of the popular comic duo Moymoy Palaboy) and a 52-year-old vegetable vendor known as Lola Fe (Grandma Fe), who achieved minor fame after a customer uploaded a clip of her singing in a public market to attract customers to her stall.⁸⁵ Their cover performance went viral online and encouraged the duo to audition for the reality singing programme *Asia’s Got Talent* in 2015, where they reached the quarterfinal round. In February of 2017, Lola Fe appeared on *Tawag ng Tanghalan* (Call of the Stage), a singing competition segment on the musical variety show *It’s Showtime*, where she performed Aegis’s “Halik”.

Aside from Roadfill and Lola Fe’s cover, there are several videos that parody Aegis’s songs: in a recording uploaded by a user named Lorientelle Tadianan in 2015, a female singer performs “Luha” but altered the lyrics to portray a mistress ranting about her married partner. The video has garnered over 2.3 million views and hundreds of comments, praising the singer’s comic timing and ability to mimic the Sunot sisters’ twirling birit and exaggerated movements.⁸⁶ Another popular video, titled “Best Luha Cover Funny” features a singer named RJ Mayuc performing “Luha” but intentionally out of tune and time, distorting the song’s vocals through the playful over-elaboration of notes — presumably to yield laughter from viewers for his “failed” attempts at mimicry, akin to

⁸⁵ The video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejvRSq_gSg4.

⁸⁶ The video can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_pKwxjf2K8.

the slapstick and impersonation segments featured on *Eat Bulaga!*.⁸⁷ Whether these cover performances lampoon or exhibit fondness to the song's original artists, they embody the impact of Aegis on audiences and Philippine culture at large. Their songs have left such a mark that they continue to be imitated, reproduced, and performed two decades later.

Aside from these covers, lyric videos, recordings of Aegis's shows across the country, and clips from their appearances on television, there are hundreds of videos uploaded on YouTube of the band's concerts held outside the Philippines. These videos range from short three-minute clips to full two-hour recordings of their shows. The most-viewed of these international videos is a two-part clip of Aegis's show held in Tokyo on 11 December 2011. The 11-minute recording features the band's performances of "Luha", "Halik", and "Basang-Basa Sa Ulan". It has garnered over six million views on YouTube.⁸⁸ Another uploaded video features a nine-minute clip from the band's concert held in Brussels on 3 October 2009, performing "Luha" and "Basang-Basa Sa Ulan". In the first minute of the video, which has garnered over a million views, Juliet and Mercy Sunot address an ecstatic crowd of supporters who overpower them with cheering and screaming.⁸⁹ Similar to other Aegis videos online, these recordings are populated with thousands of comments from fans, who lavish praise on the band's music and legacy.

Aegis have indeed had a significant international presence in recent years. Their manager Celso Abenoja estimated that in the last decade, about half of the band's concerts have been held outside of the Philippines. In most of these shows, according to the band, tickets were sold out and the venues were filled to capacity. Their concerts are at-

⁸⁷ The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIKgRyaiLCg>.

⁸⁸ The videos can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtKck7Y-6CQ> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjZAC92MyKQ>.

⁸⁹ The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL9s-r6WYWY>.

tended by many Filipinos who live and work around the world; overseas migrants currently number over 10 million, or a tenth of the country's population (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2015). Abenoja said that international concert promoters seek Aegis out, aware of the band's popularity with their countrymen. Throughout the year of 2016, for instance, they performed in 35 cities in a dozen countries. During the months of May, June, and July of 2017 alone, the band performed in 17 cities across the United States, the country with the largest population of Filipino migrants.

According to the members of Aegis, many of these overseas-based Filipino workers left the Philippines in the 1990s in search of a better life — and the band's music has served as a reminder of home. Their songs continue to shape experiences of migrant Filipinos, exemplifying how diasporic identities remain embedded in narratives of origin (Ramnarine 2007) — identities that are often articulated in musical performance and cultural display. It is a notion I confirmed in online interviews with two overseas Aegis supporters. One of them was Glory Toledo, a domestic helper who has lived in Dubai since 1999, who said:

“Aegis is my favourite band in the Philippines. I even brought a cassette tape of their album to Dubai with me — and I've listened to it for years. Now I just listen to their music using my cellphone. (...) Whenever I listen to their songs, it is as if I am back home in Davao [the southern Philippine province where Toledo is from], listening and singing along with my siblings and friends” (personal communication, 8 July 2017).

This statement affirms the prominence of Aegis during the 1990s — that for fans like Toledo, the band represented Philippine music during that decade to the point that listen-

ing to Aegis transports them back to that time. Moreover, Aegis reached a level of stardom during those years that the act of listening to their songs became a social activity for many Filipinos. When Toledo left the country to work abroad, she sought comfort from listening to the band's music, which carried with it memories from her life back in her hometown. Toledo's case also shows how technology has assisted in bolstering her fandom through the years: while she claims that her portable cassette player functions properly until today (and can still play her original tape of Aegis's album *Halik*), in recent years Toledo has listened to Aegis's songs through the music player on her mobile phone, with tracks downloaded through a website that converts YouTube videos into MP3 files.

Toledo has also watched Aegis live twice, during their shows held in Dubai in 2007 and 2016. At both concerts, Toledo shared that she and her companions — who are also Filipino domestic helpers — were “bawling from beginning to end”, as the band's music conjured up memories of their lives and loved ones back home. She also described their emotions as “tears of sadness and not joy”. In this context, Aegis's performance serves a different purpose: during the band's performances in the Philippines, audiences respond to their kitschy birit act mostly through laughter. In contrast, Filipinos overseas find themselves overcome with melancholy as they associate Aegis's music with their experiences of isolation and remoteness.

The members of Aegis confirmed to me that their fans abroad have indeed expressed their enthusiasm differently than local audiences; while they cheer and applaud for the band as loudly — or often louder — than local crowds, most of them shed tears while watching the performance. Mercy Sunot said, “It's a ‘cry fest’ in our shows abroad. Barely anyone laughs when we do our birits or O.A. (overacting) movements. (...) A lot of them have told us that they really miss the Philippines and that our songs are a reminder to them of the people they've left behind” (personal communication, 4 August

2017). While local fans typically chuckle at the extreme qualities of Aegis's act, the band's soaring vocals and exaggerated physical gestures have served to intensify the sombre feelings of overseas audiences. As Aegis related, the more severe they perform their melismas and the louder their songs go, the more emotional their fans become. These tearful reactions can be read as being rooted to the ideas and concepts that these migrant audiences associate with Aegis's songs: memories of home and their loved ones, for instance, or even memories of their own individual sentiments and experiences when they were listening to Aegis back in the Philippines. This point recalls an earlier consideration of music's ability to contain multiple values and associations, allowing it to reflect and realise individual and collective identities.

Many other overseas Aegis fans, however, do not get the opportunity to watch the band live in concert, so they express their fandom virtually on the internet. Art de Mesa, a dental assistant who moved to London with his wife in 2004, said that like Toledo, he listens to Aegis regularly through the music player on his mobile phone. He also often plays audio and video recordings of the band's performances that have been uploaded on social media websites through the years. De Mesa has also followed Aegis's career through the band's official Facebook page, where he occasionally comments on posts by both Aegis and fellow supporters. He told me:

"The last time Aegis were in London was in 2012, but my wife and I couldn't come because no one would take care of our baby, who was only two years old then. We couldn't leave him with any of our friends because they were all watching Aegis. So I've often posted on Aegis's Facebook page, asking them to please come back to the UK because they have so many fans here" (personal communication, 19 August 2017).

De Mesa said that he and his wife have occasionally invited their fellow London-based Filipino friends over to their flat, where they bond over eating Filipino food and singing karaoke. Aegis's songs have always been a popular choice, as de Mesa and his friends entertain each other with their attempts to emulate the band's sensational performance style. In this manner, Aegis's music does not only serve as the "sound of the masses" but also as the sound of migrants. Their songs represent the country they have left behind, and performing or listening to them has become an act of remembrance that fills them with thoughts and emotions concerning people and places from back home. Tia de Nora famously wrote that "[m]usic can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is" (2000, 63). This would seem an appropriate lens through which to understand the relational dynamics established by Aegis's music. For many of the band's fans abroad, they express and uphold their Filipino-ness by listening to songs that formed their identity when they were still in the Philippines.

Classicisation of Aegis

While Aegis's fanbase in the 1990s and early 2000s was comprised mostly of individuals belonging to the lower classes of Philippine society, two recent musical productions in Manila have expanded the band's audience and attracted the attention and support of critics, cultural figures, and members of the elite class that previously ignored or spurned Aegis's repertoire. The first of these productions is a stage musical based entirely on the discography of Aegis. Produced by the Philippine Educational Theatre Association, one of the country's major theatre organisations, the musical was titled *Rak of Aegis*, an allusion to the American jukebox musical *Rock of Ages*, which was built around metal rock

songs from the 1980s. *Rak of Aegis* focuses on lead character Aileen, an aspiring singer who uploads her performances on YouTube, hoping to be discovered by the American talk-show presenter Ellen DeGeneres.⁹⁰ Aileen's story is set in an impoverished neighbourhood devastated by a typhoon — a reference to Typhoon Haiyan, which ravaged the Philippine coastline in 2013. The plot is told through a combination of slapstick comedy and melodrama, embodying the influence of the New Manila Sound's brand of kitsch entertainment. It exemplifies the broadening of the scene's reach to include the theatre stage, which has generally been deemed a high art platform in the Philippines — a venue frequented mostly by the educated elite.

In the show's official programme, the production was described as “the country's first birit musical based on the music of original birit band Aegis”. The ensemble cast emulated Aegis's powerful vocal style throughout the musical — even adapting their exaggerated physical gestures while singing (as seen in the show's poster in fig. 14) — to the delight of audiences. During two shows that I attended — in July of 2014 and August of 2016 — crowds applauded and cheered whenever the characters performed Aegis's signature melismas. The production featured 20 of the band's biggest hits — all of which are birit ballads, chosen specifically for their established popularity and appeal. Save for a handful of lines altered to fit the story by playwright Liza Magtoto, Aegis's lyrics were performed as they were originally written, while musical director Myke Salomon rearranged several tracks to accommodate the vocal ranges of male characters.

⁹⁰ It is a story inspired by the rags-to-riches tales of Arnel Pineda, who became the lead singer of Journey after the band discovered his videos on YouTube, and Charice Pempengco (now named Jake Zyrus), who catapulted to fame after Ellen DeGeneres saw the teenager's performances on YouTube.



Figure 14. Promotional material for *Rak of Aegis*. Image from Philippine Educational Theatre Association.

Rak of Aegis was a sensation, with close to 300 shows — all sold out — staged from January of 2014 until August of 2016, making it the longest-running original Filipino musical in contemporary history. (The musical is also scheduled for a return run from June to September 2018.) It received widespread praise from critics and won all the main awards at the Gawad Buhay, the country's foremost award-giving body for the performing arts. The production was also heavily reported on by newspapers and television programmes, marking the first time in their career that Aegis — or at least their music — received universal positive coverage from the popular press. *Rak of Aegis*'s musical score and performances were particular subjects of acclaim, although the show's technical aspects — the choreography, lighting, and set design — were critiqued for their relative weakness. In his

review of the show, Walter Ang, the theatre critic of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, called the musical “as potent as Aegis’s all-out wailing, face-melting renditions” and cited its “gaudy Pinoy sensibility” (2014).⁹¹

The show’s success marked a major turn in the Philippine theatre industry, which has been dominated by adaptations of Western musicals and plays in the last three decades.⁹² In Western countries, musicals can be considered as a gateway for lower-class audiences to participate in traditionally higher-class contexts such as a performance theatre. But in the Philippines, musical theatre has been regarded as a highbrow territory due to its costly ticket prices — and thus has generally been attended by those from the upper classes. Aware of such a reality, the Philippine Educational Theatre Association and the producers of *Rak of Aegis* made the decision to lower the selling prices for seats, which resulted to a diverse market of viewers. By bringing into focus a figure of mass culture, the musical attracted low-income audiences to the event. As theatre critic Vincen Gregory Yu remarked: “One may even view [*Rak of Aegis*] enormous success as a vehicle for a more admirable cause: opening the doors of theatre even wider and reaching out to more varied audiences” (2016).

Conversely, the members of Aegis noted that on the two occasions that they attended the show — on 31 January 2014 (the show’s opening night) and on August 2,

⁹¹ For coverage of *Rak of Aegis* in the popular press, see also Dalupang 2014, Jorge 2014, Ortuste 2014, Yu 2016, and Alpad 2018.

⁹² The success of *Rak of Aegis* inspired the Philippine Educational Theatre Association to produce *Ako Si Josephine* (I Am Josephine) in October 2016, a musical based on the songs of pop-rock singer Yeng Constantino. Constantino, who counts Aegis as a major influence, rose to fame after winning the reality singing programme *Pinoy Dream Academy* in 2006. The musical was critically acclaimed but failed to attract a massive following the way *Rak of Aegis* did.

2015 — the audience was more “diverse” than their typical concert crowd, in that it included members of the upper classes. Juliet Sunot told me:

“To be blunt about it, most of the people who watched *Rak of Aegis* looked rich and educated. I’m just being honest here — they didn’t look masa. They were all too well-dressed (...) Before the first show started, we saw the crowd and wondered if they knew about our music or if they would appreciate it. We were shocked because they did — they were so enthusiastic and were even singing along to the songs” (personal communication, 12 April 2017).⁹³

Audiences would indeed sing along loudly with the actors to the point that after the first week of performances, an announcement had to be made prior to the start of every production, requesting that the public refrain from singing along so as not to distract the performers. Sunot’s assessment also conveys a recognition that their typical fanbase was comprised of the masses. The realisation that members of the upper classes were also admirers of their act took them by surprise, as the band were not aware of their support until *Rak of Aegis*. In an interview, the musical’s director Maribel Legarda reflected on the audience’s dynamic participation: “We had no idea that theatregoers, who are typically from the upper and upper-middle classes, would know the words to Aegis’s songs. (...) I wonder whether these people have been secret fans of the band all along and the show gave them the opportunity to come out of the closet and reveal their love for

⁹³ At the curtain call of the musical’s opening night, Aegis made a surprise appearance on stage, performing a 12-minute medley of their hit songs. In a video of the performance taken by an audience member, the majority of the crowd can be seen singing along with the band’s vocalists. The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4EIODBK9rQ>.

Aegis” (personal communication, 14 August 2016).⁹⁴ Legarda’s statement suggests that some upper-class listeners have appreciated Aegis’s music since the 1990s, but may have been embarrassed to declare their affection publicly because the band was regarded negatively by other members of the elite class. *Rak of Aegis* provided them a platform to finally acknowledge their fandom. Presented on a stage deemed highbrow in Philippine culture — the theatre — the lowbrow music of Aegis from the 1990s has not only been brought back to the consciousness of the masses, it has also been embraced by the upper class. Similar to the case of the diverse profiles of the viewers of *Eat Bulaga!’s* recent segment featuring AlDub, Aegis’s expanded fanbase may indicate a sense of cultural omnivorousness on the part of Filipino audiences, particularly those belonging to the elite class. The musical can be credited for prompting segments of the Filipino audience to extend their cultural taste to cross established boundaries between works considered high and low.

The second musical production in Manila that recently attracted the attention of audiences that may have previously dismissed Aegis’s act was a concert titled *Symphonic Aegis — Aegis in Symphony*. Organised by and held at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, the concert featured the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra (PPO), the nation’s leading orchestra, accompanying Aegis as they sung their most popular hits from the

⁹⁴ At a press conference held in May 2018 to announce the forthcoming run of *Rak of Aegis*, Legarda reiterated a sense of surprise concerning Aegis’s popularity with audiences, telling *The Manila Times*: “I’d say the show has become a success because first, we chose a very important band that apparently so many people across all social classes and ages are very familiar with” (Alpad 2018).

1990s.⁹⁵ The concert, held on 13 November 2016, sold about 1,200 out of the possible 1,600 seats at the Cultural Centre’s Main Theatre, an impressive feat considering the show was only organised and announced to the public three weeks before the event. According to an employee from the Cultural Centre’s ticketing office, the PPO’s concerts typically attract about 800 to 1,000 attendees. Owing to the first concert’s box-office success, a second *Symphonic Aegis* — *Aegis in Symphony* show was held on 11 February 2017 at the same venue. Tickets for this second concert were completely sold out — an indication of Aegis’s shifting status towards inclusion within the elite’s “official culture” alongside the group’s accepted identity as “masa”, as I explain below.

Both shows featured the same programme, opening with Aegis’s vocalists singing the operatic aria “Nessun Dorma” — certainly a break from their typical repertoire — then followed by five of the band’s own songs. After an interval, the PPO performed “Light Cavalry Overture” from Franz von Suppé’s 1866 operetta and “You’re Still You” by the American operatic pop singer Josh Groban, featuring a guest Filipino tenor named Arman Ferrer. Aegis then returned on stage to sing five more of their own songs, finishing with “Halik”. Notably, Aegis’s original songs were re-arranged by Herminigildo Ranera, the PPO’s conductor, in a classically restrained manner, with the melody and atmosphere of each track put in an orchestral setting. For instance, the arrangements allowed for a melding of PPO’s string section with the band’s electric guitars, without drowning each other’s sounds. The tempo of the songs was also slowed down and the Sunot sisters’ growling, particularly in “Halik”, was minimised. While Aegis’s vocalists

⁹⁵ This follows a trend of international orchestras performing crossover genres to attract a wider audience base, such as the National Symphony Orchestra’s (US) current concert series dubbed “NSO Pops”, which has featured their collaborations with pop music artists (such as Melissa Etheridge and Audra McDonald) and their performances of film scores (such as those from *Star Wars* and the *James Bond* movie franchise).

still showcased their birit in several parts of songs, overall their vocal performance displayed more control than usual. They were also less animated with their facial and physical gestures. Responding to such musical changes — to the seeming “classicism” or “artification” of their work — Juliet Sunot told me: “We’re used to breaking our vocal chords — *rakrakan* (rocking it out) — so it was refreshing to do quieter versions of our songs. The arrangements they gave us were beautiful and we couldn’t complain. Even singing ‘Nessun Dorma’ — that’s our first and only time to do classical music” (personal communication, 17 April 2017). That the band seemed to have relished these alterations manifests an underlying understanding on their part that in order for their act to be considered presentable on the Cultural Centre’s stage, their typical musical and performance style had to undergo minor adjustments for refinement.

Aegis and the PPO were also accompanied on stage by the interpretative dancing of a handful of members of Ballet Philippines, the country’s premier ballet company — adding an element to the highbrow feel of the performance (De Jesus 2016; Esternon 2017). These decisions concerning the event’s programming, musical arrangement, and staging were conceived to please a diverse audience. According to Ariel Yonzon, the show’s director, the concerts had a two-fold aim: first, to introduce Aegis to the CCP’s typical upper-class audience, and second, to introduce the PPO to Aegis’s mass audience that probably had never heard of the orchestra before, much less had seen them live in concert. In an interview with the television news programme *PTV News* that aired on 7 February 2017, Yonzon said: “We are opening the doors of the CCP to everyone, not just to our typical audience, by bringing in a group — Aegis — that are beloved by a lot of Filipinos. In this concert, Aegis’s masa fans will get to see our PPO, while our usual classical music aficionados will get to see the talent of Aegis.” Yonzon’s statement recognises that the events of the Cultural Centre have been frequented mostly by the moneyed

elite, highlighting the significance of the inclusion of Aegis's masa fanbase as a target market. Moreover, despite Aegis's widespread popularity throughout the years, Yonzon assumed that members of the PPO's typical audience have not witnessed Aegis's performances in the past. The inclusion of "Nessun Dorma" and "Light Cavalry Overture" in the show's programme was intended to pander to these usual patrons of the PPO, but also to showcase such operatic compositions to lower-class audiences. Similarly, the decision to "tone down" the intensity of Aegis's songs was made for "audience members who needed a gentle introduction to Aegis", as Yonzon remarked.⁹⁶

But first and foremost, Yonzon said, they selected Aegis as a collaborator in order to introduce the PPO and the CCP to a mass audience: "We wanted to bring the PPO to the masa, so we thought: what better band to collaborate with than Aegis, the masa's favourite?" For Aegis, as well as for many of their fans, the concerts indeed marked their first time to step into the grand, state-owned performing arts venue. Ticket prices for the shows were twenty-per cent lower than the usual prices for PPO's concerts, a deliberate strategy by the CCP to attract a wider audience. In an interview, Juliet Sunot said: "Those concerts were *sosyal* [colloquial for classy]. We had to dress up more nicely than our typical outfits because we didn't want to embarrass ourselves in front of the maestro and the orchestra and the sosyal audience. After all, that's the Cultural Centre. *Class* [also a colloquial for classy], right? We are now class" (personal communication, 17 April 2017). While uttering these remarks, Juliet's tone sounded tongue in cheek, as if acknowledging that their newfound "class" status may be impermanent — due not

⁹⁶ In the same interview, Raul Sunico, the current president of the CCP and the dean of the University of Santo Tomas Conservatory of Music, admitted he did not care much for Aegis's music, but became a fan of the band after watching the first *Symphonic Aegis* concert. During the second show, Sunico joined the PPO and Aegis on stage to perform the piano for two of Aegis's songs.

the CCP and the PPO. A type of dependency certainly existed between Aegis and the Cultural Centre / Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra: both the CCP and the PPO yearn for a wider demographic reach, while the band enjoys (if not needs) the higher cultural kudos.

Symphonic Aegis — Aegis in Symphony nevertheless does not represent a simple reconciliation or synthesis of the high-low dialectic that has been traced throughout this dissertation. It in fact complicates an earlier point on the growing cultural omnivorousness of Filipino audiences: while it is true that the event provided members of the upper and lower classes the opportunity to move beyond their typical cultural consumption habits, the concerts also served to reinforce notions of class and taste in Philippine society. As ethnomusicologist John Morgan O’Connell asserts, music can simultaneously unify cultural interests and perpetuate cultural differences (2010, 3). In this case, that the CPP and the PPO found the need to collaborate with Aegis — and deviate from their usual programme of classical music in order to attract a wider audience — highlights the contrast between the types of cultural works preferred by the rich and the poor. In their official programme, the concerts were billed as an “unexpected and out-of-the-box collaboration between a classical music institution and a pop rock favourite”. Such resolve to promote the concerts as a momentous affair emphasised how unusual it was for the highbrow and the lowbrow to merge in Philippine culture — and how extraordinary it was for lower-class individuals to step inside the Cultural Centre.

Even the press coverage that the event received focused on how noteworthy it was for the nation’s leading arts venue and orchestra to open their doors to the masses. A feature on the newspaper *Business World* highlighted the “unexpected fusion” of Aegis and the PPO (2017), while the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*’s positive review of the first concert, which appeared on the broadsheet’s Lifestyle and Theatre section, featured the

headline: “From ‘Nessun Dorma’ to ‘Halik’, Aegis Ushers PPO Closer to the ‘Masa’”. Veteran theatre critic Totel V. de Jesus opened his article: “The ushers at the Cultural Centre have never been so busy in a Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra concert, tip-toeing their way to the middle seats to ask some members of the audience to please stop answering SMS, tweeting, and updating their Facebook status. But all formalities in a classical concert had to be abandoned to fully enjoy *Symphonic Aegis — Aegis in Symphony*” (De Jesus 2016). His observation called attention to how “some members of the audience”, presumably the masses, were not acquainted with the expected decorum in classical music venues, confirming how the CCP’s events have been mostly attended by a more elite class.

Ultimately, if the CCP and PPO were determined to utilise popular music acts such as Aegis to expand the performing arts venue’s audience to involve the majority of Filipinos, they could have followed up the two concerts with more performances or collaborations with Aegis or other artists. Or they could have featured popular musicians in their programme of concerts and events, whether performing on their own or alongside the orchestra. But they have not done any of these since. Thus, the two concerts come across as novelties and self-serving devices that generated momentary attention and spectacle for the parties involved, particularly the PPO, since they capitalised on an act that had a bigger following than they did. As the *Inquirer’s* headline (“Aegis Ushers PPO Closer to the ‘Masa’”) conveys, the orchestra is portrayed as the beneficiary of the collaboration. All that said, what the *Symphonic Aegis — Aegis in Symphony* certainly accomplished was to confirm Aegis’s standing in the Philippine popular music industry. The Cultural Centre’s selection of the band as a form of attraction for lower-class audiences attests to Aegis’s popularity and influence with their fanbase.

Pioneering influence

During the first half of 2015, *Eat Bulaga!* produced a new weekly singing contest titled *Aegis Pa More*, featuring celebrity contestants performing Aegis's birit ballads. "*Pa more*" is Filipino slang meaning to do something repeatedly or frequently — its usage here, which is grammatically awkward, can be interpreted as an allusion to the band's persistent success after all these years. The segment ran for six months, with 44 popular actors and musicians competing with their covers of Aegis's biggest hits. The final round, held on 27 June 2015, came down to two acts: television comic Gladys Guevara and pop singer Aicelle Santos, who played the lead role in *Rak of Aegis*. Guevara sung "Sayang na Sayang" (What a Waste) while suspended upside down from the ground with the aid of a wire. Displaying her vocal pyrotechnics while twisting and turning in the air, she elicited laughter and awe from the live audience and the members of Aegis, who served as the judges of the final. Meanwhile, Santos covered "Luha" while dressed up as a traffic officer and walking around a busy road outside the studio of *Eat Bulaga!*, motioning to passing vehicles as she sung. At one point, she stopped a motorcycle driver and performed the track's soaring chorus to him. In the end, Aegis declared Guevara and Santos co-winners of the competition. *Aegis Pa More* presented such zany performances, with the most successful celebrity contestants combining vocal display with physical comedy. Emulating the type of musical spectacle that the New Manila Sound popularised and continue to promote, the singing competition can be considered not only a tribute, but also a parody, of Aegis's performances. In their acts of "meta-mimicry" — in adopting the band's birit style in a hyperbolised manner — contestants overemphasised Juliet and Mercy Sunot's already over-elaborate melismas and escalated the absurdity of their physical performance gestures.

Aegis built their name with a unique musical style centred on the dramatic parody of Western divas and rock bands, as well as traditional Filipino songs. Today, their performances are being adapted and amplified by other entertainers. In their effort to engage and captivate audiences, these new artists have found the need to intensify aspects of Aegis's act, such as sustaining melismas longer, singing and growling louder, and staging their renditions in humorous — and sometimes outrageous — visual contexts. In turn, audiences already accustomed to Aegis have been responding to these recent performances positively, regarding them as remarkable and surprising. This is what lies ahead with the kitsch musical style that Aegis adapted from *Eat Bulaga!* then pioneered in the popular music industry: it will continue to influence future performers who will reshape elements of the New Manila Sound in order to make it new for audiences — even if that purports further amplification of qualities of garishness or sentimentality.

Future iterations of the birit style, however, will not always simply be more extreme than the last. It can be postulated that a style based on excess, where each successive reinvention pushes the boundaries of that excess further, will eventually become merely absurd without any inherent quality. There will probably come a time when both musicians and audiences grow tired of the birit's excessive attributes and seek out more subdued performances. Or we might witness a return to the softer and gentler ballads of the 1980s, or even the emergence of an entirely new musical trend that Filipinos have not encountered before. Such is the case of *Eat Bulaga!*, which has promoted slapstick and mockery in hundreds of different musical segments since the 1990s. However, responding to the yearnings of its viewers in recent years, the programme has featured less comedic lampooning and more melodramatic presentations, featuring contests and segments that focus on providing welfare for the poor. Such efforts are an indication of the

New Manila Sound's capability to maintain its basic formula of kitsch spectacle while remaining adaptive to the evolving tastes of the masses.

As I have shown in this second case study, Aegis pioneered in the 1990s a deliberately exaggerated vocal and performance style that amounted to dramatic parody. Influenced largely by the musical culture promoted by the variety programme *Eat Bulaga!* during that decade, Aegis's distinctive brand of sound revolved around a type of powerful melismatic style of singing known as birit. They introduced their birit ballads through their 1995 debut album, which contains their most successful hit songs and which featured melodramatic lyrics that focused on the themes of heartbreak and loss. Aegis quickly rose to fame, as audiences found their performances to be a novel form of musical entertainment, as well as a diversion from the sombre political mood of the country. Many in their fanbase also considered the band, who came from working-class backgrounds, as the first music act in the industry to represent the sound of the masses. Due to its popularity, Aegis's birit sound influenced the musical preferences of their supporters, creating a trend in the local entertainment industry and compelling many aspiring musicians to emulate the band's style in order to attract audiences. Several individuals from the elite class, however, deemed Aegis's music as gaudy and inelegant, engendering accusations that the band has corrupted the taste of Filipinos.

From the 2000s until the present day, Aegis have managed to maintain their popularity through regular concerts in the Philippines and around the world. Crucially, their current resurgence in the music industry has been aided by digital mediation, as supporters interact with the band's members online and consume their performances on social media websites. Driven by the creation of new technological devices throughout the years, the audience has also been granted with diverse methods and platforms to cultivate and express their fandom towards the band — certainly contributing to the maintenance

of Aegis's recognition and idolisation. Moreover, Aegis's base has expanded to include those from the elite class, due in part to two recent productions that associated the group's music with the highbrow traditions of musical theatre and classical music. Aegis's original lowbrow style has also evolved in recent years through adaptations of other artists that they have influenced. The band will continue performing while audiences keep on listening to their songs and showing up to their live shows. A forthcoming concert, to be held on 13 July 2018, is titled "Ang Soundtrack ng Buhay Mo" (The Soundtrack of Your Life) — an acknowledgment not only of their immense popularity with the public, but also the degree to which their music has seeped into the individual and collective consciousness of Filipino mass society. Their songs have left a mark in the history and identity of the country's culture — with their birit ballads undoubtedly the most significant and influential genre in the contemporary music of the Philippines.

Epilogue

New Manila Sound as Filipino National Culture

Inside Klownz Comedy Bar, a music venue located in the heart of Manila, the harsh growls and ferocious sounds of the birit style resonated across a packed room. On that Saturday evening of 10 February 2018, performer Gladys Guevara opened the night's festivities with a cover of "Dadalhin" (I Will Bring) by the Filipino vocalist Regine Velasquez, who is known for her powerful melismatic runs, which Velasquez had claimed were adapted from the band Aegis. During her performance, Guevara sustained notes for both dramatic and comedic effect, even enacting exaggerated physical gestures that yielded laughs from the audience. "Welcome to open-mic," Guevara told the cheering crowd after her performance. "You all better sing as good as I did." Throughout the next three hours, keen audience members took the stage to sing renditions of contemporary hits, mostly rousing pop-rock ballads, both foreign and local. Performers who showcased their vocal pyrotechnics — through difficult songs such as British singer Jessie J's "Masterpiece" and Aegis's "Basang-Basa Sa Ulan" — received the loudest praise and applause. The open-mic segment was followed by a series of segments featuring invited guests who performed song-and-dance numbers, stand-up comedy routines, and parlour games with the audience.

The evening's programme, in essence, was a live musical variety show, with its template adapted from *Eat Bulaga!*'s pioneering example. As its name indicates, the focus at Klownz is comedic and musical spectacle, one that typically goes on past three or four in the morning, seven days a week. Its association with *Eat Bulaga!* is not incidental: the

bar was opened in 2001 by two of the show's presenters, Allan K and Ai-Ai delas Alas. The venue Klownz — and its sister bar Zirkoh (as in circus; also owned by Allan K) — are frequented by current and former performers from *Eat Bulaga!* such as Jose Manalo, Wally Bayola, K Brosas, and Guevara herself (who was mentioned in the previous section for winning the Aegis impersonation contest on *Eat Bulaga!*). The SexBomb Girls, who are now comprised of entirely new members, performed at Klownz earlier that week to a sold-out show. These venues, known in Manila and other major cities across the country as “comedy bars”, are a manifestation of how the New Manila Sound's kitsch scene has trickled down not only to other works of mass media but also to real-life, off-screen contexts. There are an estimated 40 comedy bars in the country's capital, all of which feature similar elements adapted from the New Manila Sound: aside from birit musical numbers and slapstick routines, many of these venues also feature drag impersonators. Moreover, while talented vocalists who showcase the birit technique are favoured by the audience, so are “bad” performers who entertain with their unrefined attempts at twirling birit runs, overdramatised gestures, or out-of-tune singing. Notably, these bars often feature the usage of explicit language, cursing, and overt sexual references by its performers — all of which are not permitted on broadcast television. These venues can thus be collectively viewed as a broadening adaptation of the New Manila Sound: they operate under a similar profit-based system of entertaining audiences, but with less restrictions on content and no reliance on advertisers.

Aside from these comedy bars, there are hundreds of karaoke venues across the country. Known as “KTV” (or karaoke television) bars, they feature both private rooms and public spaces where one can sing using a karaoke machine. In an article by *BBC Travel*, reporter Suemedha Sood remarked that the proliferation of karaoke venues in the Philippines “shouldn't have been all that surprising, considering the art of vocal mimicry

is a national pastime in the Southeast Asian country” (2011). This statement from a foreign observer embodies how the New Manila Sound’s scene has ushered in the growth and continuous development of a popular culture that has impacted the collective lifestyles, identities, and habits of Filipinos. In public markets, vendors sing and dance as a way of amusing each other and their passing customers — like the earlier case of vegetable vendor-turned-YouTube sensation Lola Fe. The soundscapes of markets, malls, and other public areas in the country are characterised by novelty songs — such as those of Aegis and The SexBomb Girls — booming out of audio speakers or mobile phones. At celebrations and parties, whether organised at home, in schools, or at corporate offices, performances of the latest pop songs and dance routines (typically copied from variety programmes) are featured. I have also observed how the New Manila Sound’s sense of humour, characterised by mockery and caricature, has permeated not only musical stagings but also the tone of daily conversations in households, where light-hearted insults, often using catchphrases and slang originating from *Eat Bulaga!*, are exchanged for the purpose of laughter.

Furthermore, as the realm of politics has embraced key figures from *Eat Bulaga!* such as Tito Sotto, that influence is traceable even at the level of political discourse. This is primarily through the adaptation of the musical qualities of the novelty genre by election campaigns, which utilise comedy, melodrama, and exaggeration to get their points across — as in the case, for example, of Joseph Estrada, a matinee idol-turned-politician who won the 1998 Philippine presidential elections. In campaign stages across the country, he sang and danced his official jingle, the pop track “Sha-La-La-La-La”, and was often accompanied on stage by actors, pop stars, and performers from *Eat Bulaga!* like The SexBomb Girls. The current Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte, also utilised jingles during his campaign and performed song-and-dance numbers with guest acts and mem-

bers of the public. During a state visit in Malaysia in November 2016, he bonded with Prime Minister Najib Razak during a karaoke session, where they performed Western ballads and, coincidentally, “Sha-La-La-La-La” (Goldman 2016). A year later, at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit, Duterte broke into an impromptu performance of “Ikaw” (You), a ballad by the aforementioned Filipino diva Regine Velasquez, dedicating his rendition to US President Donald Trump (Reuters 2017). “*Ikaw ang tanglaw sa ‘king mundo / Kabiyaq nitong puso ko* (You are the light in my world / A half of this heart of mine),” Duterte crooned to an amused audience of state leaders. The performance can be read as one intended to curry favour with Trump — using musical spectacle as a form of managing political and economic policy.

The New Manila Sound’s song-and-dance traditions have indeed extended to the unlikeliest of settings. In 2007, a group of inmates in a maximum security prison in the central Philippine province of Cebu attracted international attention after a video of their synchronised dance numbers went viral online (see Mangaoang 2014).⁹⁷ Dance routines continue to be part of their daily exercise and rehabilitation, a programme that has been adapted by several other prisons around the country. More recently, as part of Duterte’s war on drugs, individuals who have turned themselves in for drug abuse have been required to attend weekly police-enforced Zumba dance workouts (see Paddock 2016). While Zumba is an exercise programme created by the Colombian dancer Alberto Perez in the 1990s and involves aerobic movements performed to energetic music that is typically Latin-inspired, coverage from the popular press have reported that the songs played during these police-enforced dance sessions are local tracks such as Bayani Agbayani’s “Otso-Otso” (2004), Willie Revillame’s “Boom Tarat Tarat” (2006), and Vice

⁹⁷ The video was originally uploaded on YouTube on 17 Jul 2007 and has since garnered over 58 million views; <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMnk7lh9M3o>>.

Ganda's "Boom Panes" (2014), which are some of the biggest novelty songs popularised on musical variety programmes such as *Eat Bulaga!* and its rival *It's Showtime* (ABS-CBN News 2016; Agoncillo & Cinco 2016; Alquitran 2016).

A number of traffic enforcers around the country have also been featured in recent years by the popular press and on social media websites for dancing on the job and navigating vehicles with the swaying of their arms — either to an imaginary beat or to local novelty songs blasting from portable speakers attached to their waists. As a recent report by the *South China Morning Post* on these "traffic controllers busting moves" read: "They like to put on a show" (O'Rourke 2018).⁹⁸ These examples all attest to how the New Manila Sound has turned into a type of national culture that has diffused throughout the country.

When I asked them about the show's place in Filipino society, *Eat Bulaga!*'s producers were not high-minded about the notion that the programme represents and impacts the country's contemporary culture. As Tuviera explained:

"I'm really hesitant to say that we created, or defined, culture or pop culture here in the Philippines. But of course we're aware of how much we have affected the lives of our viewers (...) for example, how they have copied what they see on the show and perform it in their own situations. Others might say that we have been a big influence on the culture we see today across the country — and I understand that point — but you know, if we start saying that, I'm sure others will criticise us and say we're just a TV show and we

⁹⁸ The article was focused on Ramon Mangalindan, a traffic enforcer in Quezon City, the most populous city in the country and located in Metro Manila. It narrated: "Ramon's routine is not unique. There are Filipino traffic police famous for dancing on the likes of EDSA, the frequently gridlocked artery pumping traffic through Manila."

have no right to make such an ambitious assumption” (personal communication, 9 February 2017).

Tuviera’s statement intimates an awareness of his programme’s impact and influence to the culture of the Philippines. Yet his hesitance to pronounce *Eat Bulaga!* a major figure in the construction and negotiation of contemporary national culture probably stems from the vilification that the show has received from select sectors of society, such as state officials and the press.

As pioneers of the New Manila Sound, *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis successfully attracted a wide fanbase in the 1990s with a sense of humour and musical spectacle that diverted audiences from the relative gloom of the Martial Law era that had just ended. Both accurately deciphered the desires of audiences for a type of entertainment that offered an alternative to the dour satire that dominated popular culture in the country in the earlier decades. The scene — mass-market, silly, and intellectually undemanding — was a reaction to the seriousness and sombreness of the previous years, whereby its brand of kitsch served as a tool for national renewal. Recovering from over four centuries of foreign colonisation followed by a brutal dictatorship, the public were probably resentful of impositions on their culture, such as the Marcoses’s enforcements of what constituted good taste and of what counted as Filipino national culture.

The producers and performers of the New Manila Sound dealt with it by making fun of themselves — and what materialised were distinctive works, bordering on the bizarre, which fused local and foreign attributes and in the process reflected the country’s complex history. The scene’s emergence was due to a collective need to reclaim power that had been lost as a society, with audiences turning to this new kitsch genre as a way of rejecting the official but unaffordable high culture enjoyed by the upper classes. The

lower-class audience's reclamation of mass culture empowered their collective identity and challenged the hierarchies of the country's stratified society. Such newfound confidence was expressed during the 1990s through the scene's foregrounding of parody, pastiche, and exaggeration, resulting in cultural products that rebuffed the artistic traditions promoted by the country's former colonisers, both foreign and local. If we regard culture as a reflection of the public's values — as a producer and indicator of cultural meaning — then we can venture that Filipinos asserted their *Filipino-ness* through a form of mass culture that embodied their hopes and insecurities, their strengths and flaws, as a people. When considered as a mockery of the way Filipino art forms outrageously mimic international ideals and images, the garishness and gaudiness of *Eat Bulaga!*'s kitsch entertainment and Aegis's musical spectacle could indeed be interpreted as perceptive, and even ironic, self-consciousness.

As alluded to in the previous case studies, the musical spectacles of the New Manila Sound can be regarded as sites of empowerment: they provided platforms for the lower-class majority to entertain and be entertained by works that did not fit the high art category of the elite class, who were politically powerful despite comprising only one per cent of the entire population (Social Weather Stations 2011). *Eat Bulaga!*, Aegis, and their musical culture provided Filipinos entertainment, but also distraction and consolation. Their scene nullifies an archaic judgment on popular culture as an arena of mindless products consumed by an uncritical mass. Rather, popular culture can function in ways that reconfigure the public's attitudes and values. It is generated not only by elites, but also by mass occurrences from below. The New Manila Sound exemplifies the significance of music in the articulation of identities, demonstrating the capability of musical performance in reflecting wider social and cultural processes, and providing a means for creating, interacting with, and controlling these processes.

There are two clarifications to these above assertions: first, the New Manila Sound's scene was not manufactured, and indeed did not function, as a form of straight-up opposition both to the state-promoted national culture or the dominance of Western styles in local works. Its acts of subversion were neither explicit in its content, nor viewed by the government as such — though I argue that this veiled quality does not take away from the underlying disruption that the unorthodox scene enacted on Filipino culture. Second, *Eat Bulaga!*'s producer Antonio Tuviera and Aegis's lead vocalist Juliet Sunot both acknowledged in interviews that they considered their musical performances in the 1990s as a direct reaction to the political turmoil of the preceding decades. However, their affirmations may be retrospective reflections that were not clearly expressed back then. For *Eat Bulaga!*, the refashioning of the programme's content towards musical mockery and humour was intentional, Tuviera said, as manifested by presentational and production decisions they made during the start of the decade: chiefly, the dressing down of their presenters and introduction of parody segments and comedic singing contests as forms of escapist entertainment. "We wanted to distract our audience after Martial Law, after People Power," said Tuviera. "But at the same time, we didn't want to present political performances or political entertainment because we knew Filipinos were already tired of anything serious, anything that had to do with politics" (personal communication, 14 February 2018).

On the other hand, Aegis's claim that their standout spectacle was a form of musical subversion comes across as instinctive — one focused on the entertainment of their audience. During my conversation with Sunot about the matter, she did not immediately bring up the Martial Law era, focusing instead on the amusement the band brought to the public who may have needed it then. "We wanted to entertain — to make people laugh," she said. "The masa needed it then — we all needed it — because everything was

too serious.” Only when requested to elaborate on what she meant by the country’s serious condition did she state: “It was the politics that time, you know? It was chaotic. So the other local bands and musicians were only doing these serious, sad songs — and we wanted to do something different and cheer up our listeners” (personal communication, 3 March 2018).

In regarding the New Manila Sound’s scene as a form of political and cultural empowerment, it is essential to consider that the arena it exists in — the sphere of popular culture — is the product of “multiple convergences, compromises, overlaps, recordings, and appropriations” (Kun 2005, 20). The features of popular culture are not fixed or clear-cut, and thus the meaning, interpretation, or value of a work of entertainment may all evolve. It is precisely this capacity to express a multitude of qualities over time that the realm of popular culture is a complex and interesting subject of study.

I acknowledge the difficulties in viewing the story of the New Manila Sound through the lens of a narrative of overcoming and vindication — as a story of a local mass culture seemingly redeeming itself from oppressive colonial or state forces. But a utopian postcolonial future in the Philippine entertainment industries has not arrived, and perhaps will never do so, as long as Western cultures continue to sway the content and styles of local artists and their works, and the elite class control the media institutions. The anthropologist David Scott recommends that instead of idealised portrayals of the colonised’s agency in resistance, postcolonial scholarship should recognise that “the relation between past, present, and future is never a romantic one in which history rides a triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a broken series of paradoxes and reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies” (2004, 13). In the case of the New Manila Sound, while American colonisation and Marcos’s dictatorship served as forces of domination, they also prompted the rise of unanticipat-

ed possibilities in mass culture that were novel not only from the standpoint of political and cultural empowerment, but also in the scene's ability to engage the public with hybrid styles of musical performance that had not been encountered before.

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned occasionally hearing and reading from elite cultural figures and journalists their lamentations concerning the “death” of the film, music, and art industries of the Philippines. I speculated whether the New Manila Sound, and its brand of kitsch, is one form of the country's culture — a scene where the “shrine of the Filipino spirit” truly resides, to borrow Imelda Marcos's rhetoric. As I have shown throughout this study, *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis produced a musical scene that has been a major influence on the cultural products that have emerged in the country since the 1990s. But what is the value of the notion of a “national culture”? The difficulty in defining its composition is that the concept of “Filipino-ness” itself, and the identities of the nation and its people, are all neither fixed nor clear-cut in a country so diverse regionally and ethnically. And because Filipino-ness is a process that undergoes a continuing process of transformation, the idea of a national culture constantly evolves over time. It is therefore not merely a compendium of everything that one considers as Filipino or representative of the country's culture. As in the case of some cultural elites featured in this study, national culture in their view still comprises of the state-promoted genres and works from the 1970s; conversely, audiences of the case studies regard the New Manila Sound as a determiner and reflection of their tastes and desires.

Stuart Hall wrote: “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (1990, 70). The perception of national culture then is a class articulation, as well as a concept contingent on an individual's taste and interests. For a member of the educated elite, defining the notion of national culture may be a form of preservation of their subculture rooted in a

romanticised past, or a declaration of a newfound omnivorousness towards cultural consumption. For an individual lower-class consumer, on the other hand, the concept of national culture may be linked up with a larger project of social change, such as the promotion of forms of entertainment preferred by the working classes in order to advance their status in society. Therefore, because the rhetoric of one national culture is dependent on an essentialised conceptualisation of Filipino-ness — of a homogenous community of viewers and listeners — its definition remains illusive.

That said, the absence of a unified idea of national culture does not necessitate the non-existence of Filipino cultures and identities. Rather, it is a manifestation of the complexity and richness of multiple voices and sounds that exist throughout the country — across varied dispositions, classes, and backgrounds. This view encourages the expansion of one's understanding of culture to include works and subjects that have typically been located outside the typical definition of Filipino identity. The evidence of this dissertation suggests that Filipino music should no longer be viewed simply as a purely indigenous tradition “stained” by foreign colonisation and influence, but rather as an endlessly hybrid culture that has resulted from continued convergence. This approach recognises diversity and difference in local musical traditions and developments. Indeed, as the dynamics between multimedia, digital technology, and consumption practices continue to evolve in the country, enquiry into the relevancies of music's shaping of Filipino identities and cultures becomes ever more vital.

This dissertation opened with a romanticised exhortation from Imelda Marcos and so will aptly end with another. In 1974, Imelda commissioned a group of propagandists to ghostwrite a book titled *Mga Awit Sa Bagong Lipunan* (Songs of the New Society), which contained the lyrics of patriotic anthems commissioned by the state. One of the book's opening pages features a black-and-white photograph of Imelda posing with a

young, unnamed child holding a violin. “Mrs. Imelda Romualdez Marcos, First Lady of the Philippines, PATRONESS OF THE ARTS,” the caption read, the emphasis from the original text. Opposite the picture is a message from Imelda: “Music reflects the yearnings and aspirations of a people. It is the language that unites the feelings of the community, no matter in what form or nuance it may be expressed” (7; as cited in Castro 2011, 129). Ironically, the statement is entirely accurate when applied to the New Manila Sound — even if such an overt and class-orientated representation of Filipino culture might have been badly received by the Marcoses themselves. The New Manila Sound is an enduring and consequential scene whose key products, such as genres of parody and mockery, and the birit performance style, have spoken to an expanding audience in the last three decades, successfully reflecting and shaping their individual and collective identities. Instead of appraising its significance to a defined national culture, I propose that the mass culture of the 1990s can be productively viewed — historically, culturally, musically — as a commodified system of Filipino-ness, a form of culture filtered through the demands of a capitalist media enterprise. That we continue to see this system’s influence diffuse in a variety of ways and degrees — online and offline, inside homes and overseas, on screens, through audio speakers, and in everyday life — is ultimately its most important legacy.

Appendix A

List of interviews conducted

Name	Position	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Aiza Seguerra	Former host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 26, 2016	In person
Alden Richards	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 15, 2016	In person
Allan K	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 26, 2016	In person
Anonymised Respondent	Former librarian, Cultural Centre of the Philippines	Feb 24, 2018	In person
Antonio Tuviera	Producer, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 15, 2016	In person
Antonio Tuviera	Producer, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Feb 9, 2017	In person
Antonio Tuviera	Producer, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	May 29, 2018	Email
Art	Fan, Aegis	Aug 19, 2017	Email
Arthur	Fan, Aegis	Mar 28, 2017	In person
Arturo	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Bert de Leon	Director, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 21, 2016	In person
Cecile Zamora van Straten	Fashion designer and writer	Aug 24, 2016	In person
Celso Abenoja	Composer and manager, Aegis	Apr 3, 2017	In person

Name	Position	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Celso Abenoja	Composer and manager, Aegis	Mar 17, 2017	In person
Christine Jacob	Former host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 28, 2016	In person
Dawn	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 20, 2016	In person
Felipe de Leon Jr.	Former chairman, National Commission for Culture and the Arts	Sep 21, 2016	In person
Glory	Fan, Aegis	Jul 8, 2017	Email
Jacqui	Fan, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Jane	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Janine	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 20, 2016	In person
Jason	Fan, Aegis	Jul 5, 2017	In person
Jaylin	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 20, 2016	In person
Jigger Mejia	Former executive, Viva Records	Nov 3, 2016	Email
Jigger Mejia	Former executive, Viva Records	Aug 10, 2017	Email
Jimmy Santos	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 15, 2016	In person
Jocelyn	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 19, 2016	In person
Joey de Leon	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 15, 2016	In person
Jose Buenconsejo	Dean, College of Music, University of the Philippines	Sep 15, 2016	In person
Jose Lacaba	Cultural critic and journalist	Nov 2, 2016	Email
Jose Manalo	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 15, 2016	In person
Juliet Sunot	Member, Aegis	Mar 9, 2017	In person

Name	Position	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Juliet Sunot	Member, Aegis	Mar 13, 2017	In person
Juliet Sunot	Member, Aegis	Apr 12, 2017	In person
Juliet Sunot	Member, Aegis	Apr 17, 2017	In person
Juliet Sunot	Member, Aegis	Mar 3, 2018	Phone
Lily	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Liza Marcelo	Executive Producer, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 28, 2016	In person
Mae	Fan, Aegis	Mar 28, 2017	In person
Maine Mendoza	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 15, 2016	In person
Maribel Legarda	Director, <i>Rak of Aegis</i>	Aug 14, 2016	In person
Marinella	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Mary Ann	Fan, Aegis	Jul 8, 2017	Email
Mary Jane	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 1, 2016	In person
Mercedes	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Mercy	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 20, 2016	In person
Mercy Sunot	Member, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Mercy Sunot	Member, Aegis	Apr 12, 2017	In person
Mercy Sunot	Member, Aegis	Aug 4, 2017	In person
Miraflor	Fan, Aegis	Jul 5, 2017	In person
Mitoy Yonting	Former contestant, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 15, 2016	Email
Nestor Torre	Entertainment critic, <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i>	Sep 7, 2016	Email
Pat	Fan, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Paulino	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 21, 2016	In person
Poochie Rivera	Director, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 17, 2016	In person

Name	Position	Date of Interview	Type of Interview
Poochie Rivera	Director, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	May 21, 2018	Email
Queenie	Fan, Aegis	Jul 5, 2017	In person
Rachelle Ann Go	Former contestant, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 17, 2016	Email
Ray	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Sep 1, 2016	In person
Rey Abenoja	Member, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Rose Sazon	Television and music producer	Aug 8, 2017	In person
Rowena Pinpin	Member, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Ruby Rodriguez	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 17, 2016	In person
Ruel Icamen	Director, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 21, 2016	In person
Shirley	Fan, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 13, 2016	In person
Stella Pabico	Member, Aegis	Mar 17, 2017	In person
Tito Sotto	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 17, 2016	In person
Tony	Fan, Aegis	Jul 5, 2017	In person
Vic Sotto	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 17, 2016	In person
Vilma Goloviogo	Member, Aegis	Mar 8, 2017	In person
Virgie	Fan, Aegis	Jul 5, 2017	In person
Wally Bayola	Host, <i>Eat Bulaga!</i>	Aug 15, 2016	In person

Appendix B

Musical segments on *Eat Bulaga!* from 1990 to 2018

AFP Search for Singing Soldier (1992-2000)

A competition for members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

#AlDub Songwriting Contest (2016)

A competition tied to the AlDub musical-drama segment.

April Boys Vingo and Jimmy Sing-a-like Contest (1998)

A competition for impersonators of the Filipino singing duo April Boys, who were influenced by Aegis's power ballads.

Aringkingking Dance Contest (1990)

A group competition to the tune of the song "Magic Carpet Ride" by the British band Mighty Dub Katz.

Asian Big Dance Contest (1998-2001)

A competition featuring dance groups from the Asia-Pacific region.

As Long As You Love Me Dance Contest (1997)

A competition to the tune of the song by the American boy group Backstreet Boys.

Banda Rito, Banda Roon (2009)

A marching band competition. A special edition, titled *Tunog Tao*, was launched in late 2009, featuring ensembles making sounds with only their bodies.

Barangay Superstar (2014-2018)

A song-and-dance competition held in different *barangays* (towns) across the country.

Barbie Girl Dance Contest (1998)

A competition to the tune of “Barbie Girl” by the Danish-Norwegian group Aqua.

Birit Baby (1994-1999, 2009)

A competition featuring children aged 8-12 singing birit melismatic runs.

Birit Bagets (2001-2003)

A birit competition for teenagers.

Birit King (2004, 2007)

A birit competition for adult men.

Birit Queen (1997, 2004-2006)

A birit competition for adult women.

Broadway Boys in Concert (2017-2018)

A weekly musical segment featuring the male vocal group Broadway Boys, who were formed in *Eat Bulaga!* and perform local and foreign songs.

Bulagaan (1990-2018)

The show's longest-running segment featuring the presenters and guest stars delivering knock-knock jokes in the form of songs.

Check 2000 (1990)

A competition for aspiring rappers.

Chihuahua Dance Contest (2002)

A competition to the tune of "Chihuahua" by the Swiss musician DJ BoBo.

Christmas Singing Idol: Diva Edition (2017)

A competition featuring birit performances of classic Christmas songs.

Dabarkads in Concert (2013-2018)

A recurring musical segment featuring the show's presenters covering popular songs and dance tracks.

Dance Dance Revolution (2000)

A competition based on the music video game Dance Dance Revolution.

Divas and I (2003)

A birit singing competition featuring amateur contestants mimicking Western divas.

Doble Kara (1993-2000)

A competition where a performer sings in both male and female voices, with one-half of their body dressed in male clothing, while the other half is dressed in garments for women.

Eat Rocks: Christmas Jam to the Max (2012)

A competition featuring rock bands covering Filipino-language Christmas songs.

Eat Star Cafe (2005)

Akin to the Bulagaan segment, knock-knock jokes are performed in a karaoke bar setting.

E-Banda (2008)

A competition featuring rock bands formed in colleges and universities.

EB Babes (2006-2008)

A talent competition for a new in-house dance group that would replace The SexBomb Girls.

EB Battle of the Bands (2012)

A competition featuring five rock bands selected from around the country.

EB Dance Station (2009)

A competition for dance groups featuring American pop songs.

EB Gymeoke Exerci-Sing (2013)

A singing competition where contestants perform while completing gym workouts.

EB Kids' Dance Showdown (2012-2014)

A competition featuring child dancers.

Fatalbulgan (1997)

A talent competition featuring women considered plus-sized.

Flip Eat: Filipino Rap (2013)

A competition for aspiring rappers.

Gaya-Gaya, Puto Maya (1993-1997)

A competition where impersonators lip-sync and mimic the appearance of foreign musicians.

GGSS: Gayang-Gaya! Siyang-Siya! (2014-2015)

A revival of Gaya-Gaya, Puto Maya.

Habang Kapiling Ka Singing Contest (2002)

A competition to the tune of “Kahit Na”, the theme song of the local soap opera *Habang Kapiling Ka*.

Headbangers Rockfest (1994-1995)

A competition featuring rock and metal bands.

Here Comes the Hammer Dance Contest (1991)

A competition featuring the songs of American star MC Hammer.

Himig Pag-Ibig (1992)

A singing contest featuring pairs performing local and foreign love songs.

Idol of the People (2002)

A song-and-dance competition for solo performers.

Ikaw at Echo (1990-2001, 2013)

A competition where amateur singers performed covers of their Western music idols.

I'll Be There for You Singing Contest (1998)

A competition to the tune of the hit pop song by the Canadian group The Moffatts.

Just Duet (2016)

A singing competition featuring amateur contestants paired with celebrity musicians.

Kalyeserye (2015-2017)

A musical parody of soap operas featuring the duo AlDub.

Ka-Voice: Boses Lang Ang Puhanan (2015)

A competition where contestants impersonate local and international stars.

Kiddie Ballroom (1997, 2009)

A ballroom dance competition for pairs of children.

Let's Duet! (1995)

A singing competition featuring child pairs.

Let's Sing-Eat! (2009-2010)

A singing competition for groups of three or four members.

Like Mother, Like Daughter (1999)

A song-and-dance competition featuring mother and daughter pairs.

Lodi Ko Si Daddy (2017)

A dance competition featuring father and child pairs.

Lola's Playlist: Beat the Champion (2016-2018)

A competition featuring child contestants performing songs from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Lovefool Dance Contest (1997)

A competition to the tune of “Lovefool” by the Swedish band The Cardigans.

Music Hero (2016-2018)

A competition featuring child contestants skilled at playing musical instruments.

Music Hero: The Vocal Battle (2017-2018)

A competition featuring child singers.

Music Maestro (1997)

A singing competition featuring covers of Filipino songs such as those of Aegis.

O... Diva? (1999-2000)

Another birit singing contest featuring impersonations of local musicians.

Pambato ng Videoke (2011-2013)

A karaoke singing competition for amateur performers.

Pinoy King of Rock and Roll (1990-1992)

A competition featuring contestants impersonating the American singer Elvis Presley.

Pussycat Dolls Dance-Alike Contest (2009)

A dance competition to the tune of the songs of the American girl group The Pussycat Dolls.

Quadroke Singing Challenge (2008)

A karaoke singing competition featuring quartets.

Rap-Public Junior (2002)

A rap competition for child contestants.

Rap-Public of the Philippines (2002)

A rap battle competition for amateur groups.

Rockstar 2 Bakit? Sing-Alike Contest (1996-1997)

A singing competition featuring impersonators of the Filipino duo Rockstar 2.

Salute to Talent: The AFPMBAI Search for the Golden Voice (2015)

A singing competition featuring contestants who were members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Bureau of Fire Protection, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Philippine Coast Guard, or Philippine National Police.

Sing Boy Sing (1999-2000)

A singing competition for boys aged 7-12.

Sing-a-Win (2006)

A karaoke competition featuring members of the live studio audience.

Sing-Eat (2002)

An amateur singing competition featuring covers of local and foreign tracks.

Songs from the Heart (2009-2010)

A musical segment featuring performances of Jude Matthew Servilla, who previously won the Birit Baby competition.

Streetboys (1992-1997)

A musical segment featuring performances of the local all-male dance group Streetboys.

Talaga Ha? Sige Na Nga! (2004)

A competition featuring child singers impersonating local and foreign musicians.

That's My Bae: Twerk It Dance Contest (2015)

A competition to the tune of “Twerk It Like Miley” by American singer Brandon Beal.

Traffic Diva (2016)

A musical segment featuring Aicelle Santos, who perform local and foreign tracks while walking around a busy street outside the *Eat Bulaga!* studio.

Tsuperstar Dance Contest (1986)

A dance competition featuring real-life jeepney drivers.

Vanilla Ice Rap-a-Like Contest (1991)

A competition featuring impersonators of the American rapper Vanilla Ice.

Videokray (2003-2004)

A parody singing segment featuring contestants who cannot carry a tune.

Wiggle Wiggle Dance Contest (1997)

A competition to the tune of “Don’t Stop (Wiggle Wiggle)” by the American duo The Outthere Brothers.

Appendix C

Films that mirrored *Eat Bulaga!*'s kitsch style

This list, selected by the author, features slapstick comedies that typically included musical sequences. Most of these works starred former and current presenters on *Eat Bulaga!*. While there is no absolute confirmation these films considered the programme as their direct influence, their foregrounding of physical comedy and humorous musical numbers had no other precedent in the country's entertainment industry save for *Eat Bulaga!*.

Andrew Ford Medina: Wag Kang Gamol! (1991)

Goosebuster (1991)

Okay Ka, Fairy Ko! The Movie (1991)

Alabang Girls (1992)

Ano Ba 'Yan? (1992)

Takbo, Talon, Tili!!! (1992)

Astig (1993)

Home Along Da Riles The Movie (1993)

Mama's Boys: Mga Praning-Ning (1993)

Pulis Patola (1993)

Ang Pagbabalik ni Pedro Penduko (1994)

Greggy en Boggie (1994)

Hindi Pa Tapos Ang Labada, Darling (1994)

Ober Da Bakod (1994)

Megamol (1994)
Ang Tipo Kong Lalake (1995)
Indecent Professor (1995)
Ang Misis Kong Hoodlum (1996)
Aring King King: Ang Bodyguard Kong Sexy (1996)
Enteng and the Shaolin Kids (1996)
Oki Doki Doc (1996)
Rubberman: Up, Up and Away! (1996)
Ang Pinakamahabang Baba sa Balat ng Lupa (1997)
Enteng en Mokong: Kaming Mga Mababaw ang Kaligayahan (1997)
Go Johnny, Go! (1997)
Kool Ka Lang (1997)
Publik Enemy 1 n 2: Aksidental Heroes (1997)
Alyas Boy Tigas: Ang Probinsyanong Wais (1998)
Haba-baba-doo! Puti-puti-poo! (1998)
Honey, Nasa Langit Na Ba Ako? (1998)
Tataynic (1998)
Asin at Paminta (1999)
Basta't Ikaw Nanginginig Pa (1999)
D'Sisters: Nuns of the Above (1999)
Isprikitik: Walastik Kung Pumitik (1999)
Weder-Weder Lang 'Yan (1999)
Basta Tricycle Driver... Sweet Lover (2000)
Daddy Oh, Baby Oh (2000)
'Di Ko Kayang Tanggapin (2000)

Juan & Ted: Wanted (2000)

Mana Mana-Tiba Tiba (2000)

Pera o Bayong (Not Da TV)! (2000)

Tunay Na Tunay: Gets Mo? Gets Ko! (2000)

Banyo Queen (2001)

Di Kita Ma-Reach (2001)

Narinig Mo Na Ba Ang L8est? (2001)

Oops... Tekla Lang... Diskarte Ko 'To (2001)

D' Uragons (2002)

Hula Mo... Huli Ko (2002)

Home Along Da River (2002)

Jologs (2002)

Mahal Kita: Final Answer (2002)

S2pid Love (2002)

Super B (2002)

A.B. Normal College (Todo na 'Yan! Kulang Pa 'Yun!) (2003)

Ang Tanging Ina (2003)

Fantastic Man (2003)

Gagamboy (2003)

Keka (2003)

Lastikman (2003)

Mr. Suave (2003)

Pinay Pie (2003)

Bcz of U (2004)

Bridal Shower (2004)

Enteng Kabisote: Okay Ka, Fairy Ko: The Legend (2004)

Masikip Sa Dibdib (2004)

Otso Otso Pamela-mela Wan (2004)

So Happy Together (2004)

Volta (2004)

D' Anothers (2005)

Enteng Kabisote 2: Okay Ka Fairy Ko: The Legend Continues (2005)

Mano Po 4: Ako Legal Wife (2005)

Binibining K (2006)

D' Lucky Ones (2006)

Enteng Kabisote 3 : Okay Ka, Fairy Ko: The Legend Goes On and On and On (2006)

Kapag Tumibok ang Puso (2006)

Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo (2006)

Manay Po (2006)

ZsaZsa Zaturrnah Ze Moveeh (2006)

Agent X44 (2007)

Ang Cute ng Ina Mo (2007)

Apat Dapat, Dapat Apat (2007)

Desperadas (2007)

Pasukob (2007)

Ang Tanging Ina Nyong Lahat (2008)

Iskul Bukol 20 Years After (The Ungasis and Escaleras Adventure) (2008)

My Monster Mom (2008)

SupahPapaLicious (2008)

Ang Darling Kong Aswang (2009)

BFF: Best Friends Forever (2009)
Kimmy Dora (2009)
Love on Line (2009)
Nobody, Nobody But... Juan (2009)
Yaya and Angelina: The Spoiled Brat Movie (2009)
Father Jejemon (2010)
Here Comes the Bride (2010)
Mamaraꝑꝑi (2010)
Petrang Kabayo (2010)
Si Agimat at Si Enteng Kabisote (2010)
Ang Babae Sa Septic Tank (2011)
Bulong (2011)
Enteng ng Ina Mo! (2011)
Pak! Pak! My Dr. Kwak! (2011)
The Adventures of Pureza: Queen of the Riles (2011)
The Unkabogable Praybeyt Benjamin (2011)
Temptation Island (2011)
Zombadings 1: Patayin sa Shokot si Remington (2011)
D' Kilabots Pogi Brothers Web?! (2012)
I Do Bidoo Bidoo: Heto nAPO Sila! (2012)
Kimmy Dora and The Temple of Kiyeme (2012)
Moron 5 and the Crying Lady (2012)
Si Agimat, Si Enteng, at Si Ako (2012)
Sisterakas (2012)
The Mommy Returns (2012)

This Guy's in Love with U Mare! (2012)

Four Sisters and a Wedding (2013)

Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy (2013)

Kung Fu Divas (2013)

Momzillas (2013)

My Little Bossings (2013)

Raketeros (2013)

Beauty in a Bottle (2014)

Da Possessed (2014)

Diary ng Panget (2014)

My Big Bossing (2014)

The Amazing Praybeyt Benjamin (2014)

All You Need is Pag-Ibig (2015)

Beauty and the Bestie (2015)

My Bebe Love: #KiligPaMore (2015)

#Walang Forever (2015)

You're My Boss (2015)

Ang Babae sa Septic Tank 2: #ForeverIsNotEnough (2016)

Camp Savi (2016)

Die Beautiful (2016)

Enteng Kabisote 10 and the Abangers (2016)

Imagine You and Me (2016)

Love is Blind (2016)

That Thing Called Tanga Na (2016)

The Achy Breaky Hearts (2016)

The Super Parental Guardians (2016)

Barbi, D' Wonder Beki (2017)

Bes and the Besbies (2017)

Deadma Walking (2017)

Extra Service (2017)

Gandarrapiddo: The Revenger Squad (2017)

Meant to Beh (2017)

Trip Ubusan: The Lolas vs. Zombies (2017)

Ang Dalawang Mrs. Reyes (2018)

DOTGA: Da One That Ghost Away (2018)

My Perfect You (2018)

Appendix D

Musical acts following the New Manila Sound

This selection features mainstream soloists and groups of the birit ballad or comedic novelty genres that emerged in the industry from the mid-1990s and onwards, following the success of *Eat Bulaga!* and Aegis.

Aicelle Santos	Diwata
Ai-Ai delas Alas	Donna Cruz
Alden Richards	Donnalyn Bartolome
Aleck Bovick	EB Babes
Alisah Bonaobra	Elha Nympha
Alyнна	Erik Santos
Andrew E.	Frenchie Dy
Angelika dela Cruz	Freshmen
Angeline Quinto	Gerald Santos
April Boys	Gloc-9
April Boy Regino	Jake Zyrus
Arnell Ignacio	James Reid
Bayani Agbayani	Janno Gibbs
Bituin Escalante	Jaya
Blakdyak	Jed Madela
Carol Banawa	Jeremiah
Christian Bautista	Jessa Zaragoza
Daniel Padilla	Jolina Magdangal
Darren Espanto	

Jona Viray	Porkchop Duo
Jovit Baldivino	Rachelle Ann Go
Julia Clarete	Regine Velasquez
K Brosas	Renz Verano
Klarisse de Guzman	Roselle Nava
Kris Angelica	Sam Mangubat
KZ Tandingan	Salbakuta
Kyla	Sandara Park
Lani Misalucha	Sarah Geronimo
Lito Camo	Selina Sevilla
Lyca Gairanod	Sheryn Regis
Mae Rivera	The Itchyworms
Makisig Morales	The SexBomb Girls
Maja Salvador	Toni Gonzaga
Mark Bautista	Tootsie Guevara
Masculados	Tuesday Vargas
Michael V.	Vhong Navarro
Mitoy Yonting	Vice Ganda
Moirra dela Torre	Viktoria
Moymoy Palaboy	Vina Morales
Mystica	Viva Hotbabes
Nadine Lustre	Willie Revillame
Nina	Yeng Constantino
Orange and Lemons	4th Impact
Parokya ni Edgar	

Appendix E

Lyrics and translations of musical examples

“Halik”

<i>Ayoko sana na ikaw ay mawawala</i>	I was hoping you wouldn't disappear
<i>Mawawasak lamang ang aking mundo</i>	For that will ruin my life
<i>Ngunit anong magagawa</i>	But what can I do
<i>Kung talagang ayaw mo na</i>	If you really don't want it anymore
<i>Sino ba naman ako para pigilin ka?</i>	Who am I to stop you?
<i>Lumayo ka man ay maiinang</i>	Though you've distanced yourself
<i>Ang bakas ng ating pagmamahalan</i>	You've left behind traces of our love
<i>Ang awiting ito ay alaala</i>	This song is a reminder
<i>Na hindi kita malilimutan</i>	That I won't forget you
<i>Pagka't ikaw ang tanging laman</i>	Because only you
<i>Ng aking mundo</i>	Complete my world
<i>Ng aking puso</i>	My heart
<i>Ng aking buhay</i>	My life

<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?

<i>Nasasaktan ako, oh baby!</i>	I am hurt, oh baby!
<i>Sa tuwing nakikita ka</i>	Every time I see you
<i>Naninibugho ako, oh baby!</i>	I am jealous, oh baby!
<i>Pag may kasama kang iba</i>	When you're with someone else

<i>Nasasaktan ako, oh baby!</i>	I am hurt, oh baby!
<i>Sa tuwing nakikita ka</i>	Every time I see you
<i>Naninibugho ako, oh baby!</i>	I am jealous, oh baby!
<i>Pag may kasama kang iba</i>	When you're with someone else

<i>Pagka't ikaw ang tanging laman</i>	Because only you
<i>Ng aking mundo</i>	Complete my world
<i>Ng aking puso</i>	My heart
<i>Ng aking buhay</i>	My life

<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?

<i>Ayoko sana na ikaw ay mawawala</i>	I was hoping you wouldn't disappear
<i>Mawawasak lamang ang aking mundo</i>	For that will ruin my life

<i>Ngunit anong magagawa</i>	But what can I do
<i>Kung talagang ayaw mo na</i>	If you really don't want it anymore
<i>Sino ba naman ako para pigilin ka?</i>	Who am I to stop you?
<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?
<i>Ang balik mo, na-mi-miss ko</i>	I miss your kiss
<i>Bakit iniwan mo ako?</i>	Why did you leave me?

“Luha”

<i>Akala ko ikaw ay akin</i>	I thought you were mine
<i>Totoo sa aking paningin</i>	I thought I saw it
<i>Ngunit nang ikaw ay yakapin</i>	But when I came to embrace you
<i>Naglalabo sa dilim</i>	You disappeared in the dark
<i>Ninaiis kong mapalapit sa 'yo</i>	I wanted to be closer to you
<i>Ninaiis kong malaman mo</i>	I wanted you to know
<i>Ang mga paghihirap ko</i>	All of my hardships
<i>Balewala lang sa 'yo</i>	But they were nothing to you
<i>Ikaw ay aking minahal</i>	I have loved you
<i>Kasama ko ang Maykapal</i>	God is my witness
<i>Ngunit ako pala'y naging isang hangal</i>	But turns out I'm a fool
<i>Nagbahangad ng isang katulad mo</i>	For desiring someone like you
<i>Hindi ko na kailangan</i>	I don't need you anymore
<i>Umalis ka na sa aking harapan</i>	Leave me alone
<i>Damdamin ko sa 'yo</i>	My feelings for you
<i>Ngayon ay naglaho na</i>	Have now disappeared

<i>At ito ang 'yong tandaan</i>	And keep this in mind
<i>Ako'y masyadong nasaktan</i>	You hurt me terribly
<i>Pag-ibig at pagsuyo na kabit na sa luha</i>	My love and affection, even in tears
<i>Mababayaran mo</i>	You will pay for this
<i>Tingnan mo ang katotohanan</i>	Look at the reality
<i>Na tayo'y pare-pareho lamang</i>	That we are all the same
<i>May damdamin ding nasasaktan</i>	With feelings that can be hurt
<i>Puso mo'y nasaan</i>	Where is your heart?
<i>Ayaw ko nang mangarap</i>	I don't want to hope anymore
<i>Ayaw ko nang tumingin</i>	I don't want to look anymore
<i>Ayaw ko nang manalamin</i>	I can't look at myself anymore
<i>Nasasaktan ang damdamin</i>	I will just hurt myself
<i>Gulong ng buhay</i>	The wheel of life
<i>Patuloy-tuloy sa pag-ikot</i>	Will keep on spinning
<i>Noon ako ay nasa ilalim</i>	I've always been at the bottom
<i>Bakit ngayon nasa ilalim pa rin?</i>	Why am I still here at the bottom?
<i>Gulong ng buhay</i>	The wheel of life
<i>Patuloy-tuloy sa pag-ikot</i>	Will keep on spinning
<i>Noon ako ay nasa ilalim</i>	I've always been at the bottom
<i>Sana bukas nasa ibabaw naman</i>	I hope tomorrow I'll be on top

“Basang-Basa Sa Ulan”

<i>Heto ako ngayon, nag-iisa</i>	Here I am, alone
<i>Naglalakbay sa gitna ng dilim</i>	Journeying in the dark
<i>Lagi na lang akong nadarapa</i>	I always fall down
<i>Ngunit heto, bumabangon pa rin</i>	But I stand up again

<i>Heto ako, basang-basa sa ulan</i>	Here I am, drenched in the rain
<i>Walang masisilungan, walang malalapitan</i>	With no shelter, no one to turn to
<i>Sana’y may luha pa, akong mailuluha</i>	I wish to have tears left to cry
<i>At ng mabawasan ang aking kalungkutan</i>	To ease my sorrows

<i>Dumi at putik sa aking katawan</i>	Dirt and mud on my body
<i>Ihip ng hangin at katahimikan</i>	The wind and the silence
<i>Bawat patak ng ulan at ang lamig</i>	Every drop of rain and the cold
<i>Waring nag-uutos</i>	Commanding me
<i>Upang maglaho ang pag-ibig</i>	To let go of my love

<i>Heto ako ngayon, nag-iisa</i>	Here I am, alone
<i>Naglalakbay sa gitna ng dilim</i>	Journeying in the dark
<i>Lagi na lang akong nadarapa</i>	I always fall down
<i>Ngunit heto, bumabangon pa rin</i>	But I stand up again

<i>Heto ako, basang-basa sa ulan</i>	Here I am, drenched in the drain
<i>Walang masisilungan, walang malalapitan</i>	With no shelter, no one to turn to
<i>Sana'y may luha pa, akong mailuluha</i>	I wish to have tears left to cry
<i>At ng mabawasan ang aking kalungkutan</i>	To ease my sorrows

<i>Heto ako, basang-basa sa ulan</i>	Here I am, drenched in the drain
<i>Walang masisilungan, walang malalapitan</i>	With no shelter, no one to turn to
<i>Sana'y may luha pa, akong mailuluha</i>	I wish to have tears left to cry
<i>At ng mabawasan ang aking kalungkutan</i>	To ease my sorrows

<i>ang aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows
<i>ang aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows
<i>and aking kalungkutan</i>	My sorrows

Bibliography

Books

ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation. 1999. *Pinoy Television: The Story of ABS-CBN*. Pasig City: Benpres Publishing Inc.

Adorno, Theodor. 1932. "Kitsch". In *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (2002). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 501-505.

_____. 1951. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (1974). London: Verso Books.

_____. 1962. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton. New York: Continuum.

Almario, Virgilio. 1993. *Filipino ng mga Filipino: Mga Asterisko sa Istandard na Ispelang, Estilo sa Pagsulat, at Paraan ng Pagpapayaman sa Wikang Pambansa* (Filipino of the Filipino: Notes on Standardised Spelling, Writing Styles, and Methods for Enriching the National Language). Manila: Anvil Publishing.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bailes, Sara Jane. 2010. *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service*. London: Routledge.

Balance, Christine Bacareza. 2016. *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Barendregt, Bart, Peter Keppy, and Henk Schulte Nordholt. 2017. *Popular Music in Southeast Asia: Banal Beats, Muted Histories*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Barz, Gregory and Timothy Cooley (eds.). 2008. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beollstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

_____. 2006. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences". In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. New York: Routledge New York, 155-157.

Bonner, Raymond. 1987. *Waltzing with a Dictator: The Marcoses and the Making of American Policy*. New York: Times Books.

Born, Georgina. 2000. "Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities". In *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, eds. Born and David Hesmondhalgh. London: University of California Press, 31-47.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

_____. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Boym, Svetlana. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

Bristol, Michael D. 1985. *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*. New York and London: Methuen.

Broch, Hermann. 2002. "Evil in the Value System of Art". In *Geist and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age: Six Essays by Hermann Broch*. New York: Counterpoint, 3-39.

Burckhardt Qureshi, Regula. 2002. *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*. New York: Routledge.

Burgess, Jean and Joshua Green. 2009. *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Călinescu, Matei. 1987. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Cantijoch, Marta, Rachel Gibson, and Stephen Ward (eds.). 2014. *Analysing Social Media Data and Web Networks*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carey, John. 1992. *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia*. London: Faber & Faber.

Castro, Christi-Anne. 2011. *Musical Renderings of the Philippine Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chirino, Pedro. 1604. *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas i de lo que en ellas an trabaiado los padres dae la Compañia de Iesus*. Rome: Por Estavan Paulino.

Coronel, Sheila (ed.). 1999. *From Loren to Marimar: The Philippine Media in the 1990s*. Quezon City: Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism.

De Leon, Felipe Padilla. 1976. "Culture: A Solution to our Problems". In *Readings on Philippine Culture and Social Life*, eds. Amaro Lardizabal and Felicitas Tensuan-Leogardo. Manila: Rex Book Store, 104-126.

De San Antonio, Juan Francisco. 1738–1744. *Chronicas de la apostolica Provincia de S. Gregorio de religiosos descalços de N. S. P. San Francisco en las Islas Philipinas, China, Japon*. Sampaloc: Convento de Nra. Senora de Loreto del Pueblo de Sampaloc.

Del Mundo, Clodualdo Jr. 2003. *Telebisyon: An Essay on Philippine Television*. Manila: CCP, NCCA.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 2003. *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dueck, Byron. 2013. *Musical Intimacies and Indigenous Imaginaries: Aboriginal Music and Dance in Public Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eliot, T. S. 1973. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. London: Faber & Faber.

Enriquez, Elizabeth L. 2003. *Radyo: An Essay on Philippine Radio*. Manila: CCP, NCCA.

Fernandez, Doreen G. 1994. "Philippine Theatre". In *CCP Encyclopaedia of Philippine Art VII* (1st ed), ed. Nicanor Tiongson. Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines, 87-120.

_____. 1996. *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theatre History*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Fielding, Nigel, Raymond Lee, and Grant Blank (eds.). 2008. *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Flynn, Dennis O. and Arturo Giraldez. 2006. "Globalisation Began in 1571". In *Globalisation and Global History*, eds. Barry K. Gills and William R. Thompson. London: Routledge, 232-247.

Frith, Simon. 2001. "Pop Music". In *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 93-108.

Garcia, J. Neil C. 2014. *The Postcolonial Perverse: Critiques of Contemporary Philippine Culture*. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

_____. 2008. *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla to Silabis to MSM*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Greenberg, Clement. 1961. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon.

Hall, Stuart. 1981. "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'." In *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 227-240.

_____. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 222-237.

Herzfeld, Michael. 2016. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions*. New York: Routledge.

Hau, Caroline S. 2002. "The 'Cultural' and 'Linguistic' Turns in Philippine Scholarship". In *Ruptures and Departures: Language and Culture in Southeast Asia*, ed. Corazon D. Villarreal. Quezon City: Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of the Philippines Diliman, 141-167.

Herman, Edward S. and Noam Chomsky. 2002. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hila, Antonio. 1994. "Musika: An Essay on Philippine Music". In *Filipiniana*. Manila: CCP, 17-32.

_____. 2004. *Music in History: History in Music*. Manila: UST Publishing House.

Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.

Horst, Heather and Daniel Miller (eds.). 2012. *Digital Anthropology*. London: Berg.

Irving, David R. M. 2010. *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Iyer, Pico. 1988. *Video Night in Kathmandu and Other Reports from the Not-So-Far East*. New York: Vintage Departures.

Kulka, Tomáš. 1996. *Kitsch and Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Kun, Josh. 2005. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lacaba, Jose F. 1993. "Notes on Bakya, Being an Apologia of Sorts for Filipino Mass Cult". In *Readings in Filipino Cinema*, ed. Rafael Maria Guerrero. Manila: Experimental Cinema of the Philippines Publications, 37-43.

Lent, John (ed.). 1978. *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and TV*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Levine, Lawrence. 1998. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lo, Jacqueline. 2000. "Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities". In *Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media, and Popular Culture*, eds. Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law, and Mandy Thomas. Sydney: Pluto Press, 152-168.

Lockard, Craig A. 1998. *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Maceda, Jose. 1998. *Gongs & Bamboo: A Panorama of Philippine Music Instruments*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.

- Mankekar, Purnima. 1999. *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Meisel, Perry. 2009. *The Myth of Popular Culture: From Dante to Dylan*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Miller, Kiri. 2012. *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mitchell, James Leonard. 2015. *Luk Thung: The Culture and Politics of Thailand's Most Popular Music*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Mora, Manolete. 2006. *Myth, Mimesis, and Magic in the Music of the T'boli, Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Mulder, Niels. 1997. *Inside Philippine Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*. Quezon City: New Day.
- Nagahara, Hiromu. 2017. *Tokyo Boogie-Woogie: Japan's Pop Era and Its Discontents*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Negus, Keith. 1997. *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Nettl, Bruno. 1983. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Olson, James Stuart. 1991. *Historical Dictionary of European Imperialism*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Ong, Jonathan Corpus. 2015. *The Poverty of Television: The Mediation of Suffering in Class-Divided Philippines*. London, NY: Anthem Press.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose. 1932. *The Revolt of the Masses*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Peletz, Michael. 2009. *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times*. New York: Routledge.

Pfister, Manfred (ed.). 2002. "Introduction: A History of English Laughter?". In *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, v-x.

Quiambao, Jacob S. 1976. "The Filipino Family and Society". In *Readings on Philippine Culture and Social Life*, eds. Amaro Lardizabal and Felicitas Tensuan-Leogardo. Manila: Rex Book Store, 31-62.

Rafael, Vicente L. 2000. *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

_____. 2016. *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language Amid Wars of Translation*.

Durham: Duke University Press.

Redmond, Sean and Su Holmes. 2007. *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*. London: Sage Publications.

Reyes, Soledad S. 2014. "Komiks into Films (1970s and 1980s): Texts as Cultural Practices". In *A Reader in Philippine Film History and Criticism*, eds. Jonathan Chua, Rosario Cruz-Lucero, and Rolando B. Tolentino. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 98-111.

Robertson, Roland. 1995. "Glocalisation: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity". In *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson. London: Sage Publications, 25-44.

Rodell, Paul A. 2002. *Culture and Customs of the Philippines*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Roxas-Tope, Lily Rose. 1998. *(Un)framing Southeast Asia: Nationalism and the Postcolonial Text in English in Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines*. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, Office of Research Coordination.

Schulman, Milton. 1973. *Ravenous Eye: The Impact of the Fifth Factor*. Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shepherd, John (ed.). 2005. *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*. London: Continuum.

Skeggs, Beverley. 2004. *Class, Self, and Culture*. London and Routledge.

Snickars, Pelle and Patrick Vonderau (eds.). 2009. *The YouTube Reader*. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Sontag, Susan. 1964. "Notes on 'Camp'". In *Against Interpretation*. New York: Delta, 275-292.

Stahl, Matthew. 2004. "A Moment Like This: American Idol and Narratives of Meritocracy". In *Bad Music*, ed. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno. New York: Routledge, 212-232.

Steinberg, David Joel. 1982. *The Philippines: A Singular and A Plural Place*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Steingo, Gavin. 2016. *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Stone, Ruth. 2008. *Theory for Ethnomusicology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Strangelove, Michael. 2010. *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*.

Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Tadiar, Neferti. 2004. *Fantasy Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences in the New World Order*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press.

Tiongson, Nicanor (ed.). 1994. *CCP Encyclopaedia of Philippine Art (Vol. 6: Philippine Music)*.

Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines.

Tomlinson, Stephen. 2005. *Head Masters: Phrenology, Secular Education, and Nineteenth-century Social Thought*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Turino, Thomas. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vernallis, Carol. 2013. *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1983. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yano, Christine. 2002. *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Asia Centre.

Journal Articles

Drake, Philip and Andy Miah. 2010. "The Cultural Politics of Celebrity". *Cultural Politics*, 6:1, 49–64.

Fernandez, Doreen G. 2002. "Pinoy Baduy". *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, 5:3, 389–393.

Frederick, Evan, Choong Hoon Lim, Galen Clavio, and Patrick Walsh. 2012. "Why We Follow: An Examination of Parasocial Interaction and Fan Motivations for Following Athlete Archetypes on Twitter". *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 5:4, 481–502.

Gallant, Linda. 2011. "Communicative Informatics: An Active and Creative Audience Framework of Social Media". *TripleC: Cognition, Communication, Cooperation*, 9:2, 231–246.

Gimenez-Maceda, Teresita. 1985. "The Culture of Resistance: A Study of Protest Songs from 1972-1980". *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*, 1:1, 29–35.

Hart, Donn. 1968. "Homosexuality and Transvestism in the Philippines: The Cebuan Filipino Bayot and Laki-on". *Behavior Science Notes*, 4, 211–248.

Kalinov, Kalin. 2017. "Transmedia Narratives: Definition and Social Transformations in the Consumption of Media Content in the Globalised World". *Postmodernism Problems*, 7, 60–68.

Labrecque, Lauren I. 2014. "Fostering Consumer–Brand Relationships in Social Media Environments: The Role of Parasocial Interaction". *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28:2, 134-148.

Labrecque, Lauren I. and Mujde Yuksel. 2016. "'Digital Buddies': Parasocial Interactions in Social Media". *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10:4, 305–320.

Lopez, Ferdie. 2007. "Beyond the Straight Line; The Bakla Interrupted". *Manila Studies Association Journal*, 13, 131–145.

Lysloff, René. 2003. "Musical Community on the Internet: An On-line Ethnography". *Cultural Anthropology*, 18:2, 233–63.

Mangaoang, Áine. 2014. "Performing the Postcolonial: Philippine Prison Spectacles After Web 2.0". *Postcolonial Text*, 9:4. <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/1803>.

Manuel, E. Arsenio. 1980. "The Epic in Philippine Literature". *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 44.I:4, 288–337.

Meizel, Katherine. 2009. "Making the Dream a Reality (Show): The Celebration of Failure in American Idol". *Popular Music and Society*, 32:4, 475–588.

Metzer, David. 2012. "The Power Ballad". *Popular Music*, 31:3, 437–459.

O'Connell, John Morgan. 2010. "A Staged Fright: Musical Hybridity and Religious Intolerance in Turkey, 1923-38". *Twentieth-Century Music*, 7:1, 3–28.

Peterson, Richard A. and Roger M. Kern. 1996. "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore". *American Sociological Review*, 61:5, 900–909.

Prior, Nick. 2013. "Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music Consumption: A Critical Assessment of Recent Developments". *Sociology Compass*, 7:3, 181–193.

Ramnarine, Tina. 2007. "Introduction: Musical Performance in the Diaspora". *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 16:1, 1–17.

Reily, Suzel Ana. 2003. "Ethnomusicology and the Internet". *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 35, 187–92.

Rubin, Rebecca and Elizabeth Perse. 1989. "Attribution in Social and Parasocial Relationships". *Communication Research*, 16:1, 59–77.

Siriyuvasak, Ubonrat. 1990. "Commercialising the Sound of the People: Pleng Luktoong and the Thai Pop Music Industry". *Popular Music*, 9:1, 61–77.

Thorson, Kjerstin and Shelly Rodgers. 2006. "Relationships Between Blogs as eWOM and Interactivity, Perceived Interactivity, and Parasocial Interaction". *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6:2, 5–44.

Warde, Alan, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal. 2007. "Understanding Cultural Omnivorousness: Or, the Myth of the Cultural Omnivore". *Cultural Sociology*, 1:2, 143–64.

Wendt, Reinhard. 1998. "Philippine Fiesta and Colonial Culture". *Philippine Studies*, 46:1, 3–23.

Press and Online Sources

ABS-CBN News. 2016. “Mandaluyong Drug Users Forced to Do Zumba to ‘Detoxify’”. In *ABS-CBN News*. 6 Jul 2016. <http://news.abs-cbn.com/classified-odd/07/06/16/mandaluyong-drug-users-forced-to-do-zumba-to-detoxify>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Agoncillo, Jodee and Maricar Cinco. 2016. “Druggies, Pushers Join Zumba Addicts”. In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 7 Jul 2016. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/794752/druggies-pushers-join-zumba-addicts>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Alpad, Christina. 2018. “‘Rak of Aegis’ Keeps the Audience Coming”. In *The Manila Times*. 25 May 2018. <http://www.manilatimes.net/rak-of-aegis-keeps-the-audience-coming/401045/>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Alquitran, Non. 2016. “Drug Users Dance Their Way to Detoxification”. In *Philippine Star*. 11 Jul 2016. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/07/11/1601675/drug-users-dance-their-way-detoxification>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Ang, Walter. 2014. “‘Rak of Aegis’ — Fitful Narrative, Heart-Rending Music”. In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 15 Feb 2014. <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/151633/rak-of-aegis-fitful-narrative-heart-rending-music/>. Accessed 5 Jun 2018.

Argente, Evangeline. “Letter to the Editor: On *Eat Bulaga*”. In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 23 Jun 1996, page A11.

Associated Press. 2013. "Political Clans, Celebrities Dominate Ballots in Philippines' Congressional, Local Polls". In *Asian Journal*. 14 May 2013. <http://asianjournal.com/news/political-clans-celebrities-dominate-ballots-in-philippines-congressional-local-polls>. Accessed 12 Jun 2016.

Burkholder, J. Peter. "Borrowing". In Grove Music Online, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52918>. Accessed 10 Aug 2017.

Business World. "Hugot Pa More with Aegis and the PPO". In *Business World*. 8 Feb 2017. <http://www.bworldonline.com/content.php?section=Arts&Leisure&title='Hugot-pa-more'-with-Aegis-and-the-PPO&id=140257>. Accessed 5 Jun 2018.

Camus, Miguel. 2015. "In the Age of 'AlDub,' Television Proves It is Still King". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 7 Oct 2015. <http://business.inquirer.net/200365/in-the-age-of-aldub-television-proves-it-is-still-king#ixzz5AdMVUxTQ>. Accessed 23 Nov 2016.

_____. 2018. "PH is World Leader in Social Media Usage". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 15 Feb 2018. <http://business.inquirer.net/246015/ph-world-leader-social-media-usage>. Accessed 28 May 2018.

Canave-Dioquino, Corazon. 2015. "Philippine Music, A Historical Overview". In National Commission for Culture and the Arts. 15 Apr 2015. <http://ncca.gov.ph/submissions/subcommission-on-the-arts-sca/music/philippine-music-a-historical-overview>. Accessed 10 Aug 2016.

Carvacio, Emerlita. 1993. "Longtime 'Lunch Date' Bids Farewell to 'TV Fans'". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 10 Oct 1994, page D1.

Cepeda, Cody. 2018. "Filipino Wows Judges, Audience in 'The X Factor UK' for Singing in Two Voices". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 17 Sep 2018. <https://entertainment.inquirer.net/293820/filipino-wows-judges-audience-in-the-x-factor-uk-for-singing-in-two-voices>. Accessed 28 Sep 2018.

Chen, Heather. 2015. "AlDub: A Social Media Phenomenon About Love and Lip-synching". In *BBC News*. 28 Oct 2015. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34645078>. Accessed 24 Jan 2016.

Dalupang, Denison Rey. 2014. "Appealing Soundscape, Vocal Brilliance in 'Rak of Aegis'". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 15 Mar 2014. <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/154000/appealing-soundscape-vocal-brilliance-in-rak-of-aegis/>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

De Jesus, Totel V. 2016. "From 'Nessun Dorma' to 'Halik', Aegis Ushers PPO Closer to the 'Masa'". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 28 Nov 2016, page D4.

_____. 2018. "Raul Sunico Joins 'Hugot' Concert of Aegis and PPO". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 6 Feb 2017. <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/253597/raul-sunico-joins-hugot-concert-aegis-ppo/>. Accessed 6 Jun 2018.

De Vera, Ruel S. 2011. "The Kenkoy Experience". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 17 Sep 2011. <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/14433/the-kenkoy-experience/>. Accessed 17 Apr 2016.

Esternon, Ann. 2017. "Bibirit Muli sa CCP: Aegis in Symphony, Symphonic Aegis". In *Abante*. 5 Feb 2017. <http://today.abante.com.ph/bibirit-muli-sa-ccp-aegis-symphony-symphonic-aegis.htm>. Accessed 6 Jun 2018.

Goldman, Russell. "Rodrigo Duterte Takes Karaoke Diplomacy to Malaysia". In *New York Times*. 11 Nov 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/12/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-najib-razak-karaoke.html>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Gray, Spalding. 1993. "In His Mind's Eye". In *Conde Nast Traveler*. Nov 1993, 138.

Jorge, Rome. 2014. "Rising Above the Flood: 'Rak of Aegis' the Musical". In *Rappler*. 16 Jan 2014. <https://www.rappler.com/life-and-style/arts-and-culture/theater/48025-rising-above-flood-rak-of-aegis-musical>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Legaspi, Richard F. 1994. "NCCA Official Not a Fan of Variety Show *Eat Bulaga*". In *Manila Standard*. 7 Sep 1994, page D7.

Lynch, Kevin. 2016. "10 Years of Twitter: Five Key Tweets That Made Record-Breaking History". In Guinness World Records. 21 Mar 2016. <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2016/3/10-years-of-twitter-five-key-tweets-that-made-record-breaking-history-421461>. Accessed 8 Jun 2016.

Martin, Alex. 2008. “‘Enka’ Still Strikes Nostalgic Nerve”. In *The Japan Times*. 18 Nov 2018. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2008/11/18/reference/enka-still-strikes-nostalgic-nerve/>. Accessed 11 Oct 2018.

Martirez, Charlotte. 1995. “Why Did ‘Sang Linggo nAPO Sila Get Cancelled?’” In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 4 Mar 1995, page C8.

Mga Awit Sa Bagong Lipunan. 1974. Manila: ERA4.

O’Rourke, Benjamin. 2018. “Filipino Traffic Controller Ramon Brings Awesome Dance Moves to the Streets of Manila”. In *South China Morning Post*. 10 Jan 2018. <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2127638/filipino-traffic-controller-ramon-brings-awesome-dance>. Accessed 7 Feb 2018.

Ortuoste, Jenny. 2014. “Theater Review: ‘Rak of Aegis’ is Joyful Storm of Humour and Music”. In *GMA News*. 22 Feb 2014. <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/content/349642/theater-review-rak-of-aegis-is-joyful-storm-of-humor-and-music/story/>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Osias, Peter. 2011. “Hotdog: An Enduring Legacy of OPM Hits”. In *Philippine Star*. 21 Nov 2011, page F2.

Paddock, Richard C. 2016. "In Philippine Drug War, Little Help for Those Who Surrender". In the *New York Times*. 5 Sep 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/world/asia/in-philippine-drug-war-little-help-for-those-who-surrender.html>. Accessed 7 Feb 2018.

Philippine Statistics Authority. 2015. *Census of Population and Housing*. <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/census/population-and-housing>. Accessed 8 Feb 2016.

Policarpio, Allan, Bayani San Diego Jr., Marinel Cruz. 2013. "Noontime TV Landscape: The Battle Heats Up". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 2 Feb 2013. <http://entertainment.inquirer.net/79311/noontime-tv-landscape-the-battle-heats-up>. Accessed 20 Sep 2016.

Reuters. "Philippines' Duterte Sings Love Song for Trump: 'You are the Light'". In *Reuters*. 13 Nov 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/13/you-are-the-light-philippines-duterte-sings-love-song-for-trump>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Reyes, Anthony. 1990. "New Variety Show Eat Bulaga Beats Student Canteen Ratings". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 17 Jun 1990, page C4.

Salazar, Jose S. 1969. "Cultural Centre is Anti-Revolutionary Instrument of Establishment and Therefore Not Truly Cultural". In *Philippine Free Press*. 15 Nov 1969, page 14.

San Diego, Bayani. 2015. "Split-Screen TV Fairy Tale 'AlDub' Hit in Old, New Media". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 16 Aug 2015. <http://entertainment.inquirer.net/176591/split-screen-tv-fairy-tale-aldub-hit-in-old-new-media>. Accessed 17 Jul 2016.

Santos, Ramon P. 2015. "Philippine Music Forms/Composition". In National Commission for Culture and the Arts. 15 Apr 2015. <http://ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-the-arts-sca/music/philippine-music-formscomposition>. Accessed 20 Jan 2016.

Schenker, Frederick. 2016. "Empire of Syncopation: Music, Race, and Labour in Colonial Asia's Jazz Age". PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Online copy accessed from author.

Social Weather Stations. 2011. *Family Income Distribution in the Philippines, 1985-2009: Essentially the Same*. https://www.sws.org.ph/pr20110321%20-%20Family%20Income%20Distribution%20by%20Mr%20Tomas%20Africa_FINAL.pdf. Accessed 8 Feb 2016.

Sood, Suemedha. 2011. "Karaoke in the Philippines". In *BBC Travel*. <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20110812-travelwise-karaoke-in-the-philippines>. Accessed 8 Jun 2018.

The Economist. 2007. "The Philippines' Elections: Celebrity Big Ballot". In *The Economist*. 26 Apr 2007. <http://economist.com/node/9084791>. Accessed 15 Feb 2016.

The Manila Times. 2014. "TV Ownership on the Rise, while Filipinos Still Read Newspapers". In *The Manila Times*. 20 Feb 2014. <http://www.manilatimes.net/tv-ownership-on-the-rise-while-filipinos-still-read-newspapers/77179/>. Accessed 14 Feb 2016.

Tuazon, Ramon R. 2015. "Philippine Television: That's Entertainment". 30 Apr 2015. <http://ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-disseminationscd/communication/philippine-television-thats-entertainment/#>. Accessed 24 Mar 2016.

Wang, Nickie. 2015. "Make Way for Alden and Yaya Dub". In *Manila Standard*. 28 Jul 2015. <http://manilastandardtoday.com/showbitz/183290/make-way-for-alden-and-yaya-dub.html>. Accessed 22 Jun 2016.

Yu, Vincen Gregory. 2016. "'Rak of Aegis': Down to the Last Show, 'Sing-tamis ng Wine, Sin-tatag ng Sunshine'". In *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 3 Sep 2016. <http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/236900/rak-of-aegis-down-to-the-last-show-sing-tamis-ng-wine-sin-tatag-ng-sunshine/>. Accessed 9 Jun 2018.

Discography

Aegis. 1995. *Halik*, Alpha Records.

Aegis. 1999. *Mahal na Mahal Kita*, Alpha Records.

Aegis. 2000. *Paskung-Pasko*, Alpha Records.

Aegis. 2001. *Awit at Pag-Ibig*, Alpha Records.

Aegis. 2003. *Muling Balikan*, Harmony Music.

Aegis. 2006. *Aegis Greatest Hits*, Alpha Records.

Aegis. 2014. *Aegis Greatest Hits, Vol. 2*, Alpha Records.

Agbayani, Bayani. 2004. *Ito Gusto Mo!*, Star Music.

Aguilar, Freddie. 1977. *Anak*, RCA Records.

Alejandro, Hajji. 1978. *Kay Ganda ng Ating Musika*, Vicor Music.

Cuneta, Sharon. 1978. *DJ's Pet*, Sunshine Records.

Ganda, Vice. 2014. *Boom Panes*, Star Music.

La Torre, Sylvia. 1956. *Kung Kita'y Kapiling*, Villar Records.

Itchyworms, The. 2005. *Noontime Show*, Universal Records.

Revillame, Willie. 2006. *Namamasko Po!*, Star Music.

SexBomb Girls, The. 2003. *Round 2*, GMA Records.

Various Artists. 2013. *Eat Bulaga Dabarkads D' Album (A Party for Every Juan!)*, Ivory Music.

Online Videos

Aaron Ching. 2014. "Aegis Live @ PETA, Rak of Aegis". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4EIODBK9rQ>. Accessed 29 Sep 2017.

Byron F Garcia. 2007. "Thriller". [online video] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMnk7lh9M3o>. Accessed 10 Mar 2018.

CJ Velasco. 2011. "Eat Bulaga Theme on 10th Year Anniversary and first telecast on ABS-CBN". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0j1lfEvTKY>. Accessed 8 Feb 2016.

DeroVolk. 2017. "March of the New Society (Philippines) — Bagong Pagsilang March". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw8zAhiilsU>. Accessed 11 Nov 2017.

DinoMeow. 2009. "Basang Basa Sa Ulan - Aegis w/ Lyrics". [online video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rjb0EP8Y_iE. Accessed 10 Oct 2018.

Doll Mae. 2015. "AlDub Eat Bulaga (from Day 1 to Day 9)". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MIH9Tu0-9c>. Accessed 20 Apr 2016.

Feeling Songers. 2016. "Best Luha Cover Funny by Aegis — Efos". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIKgRyaiLCg>. Accessed 28 Sep 2017.

Fruitella1211. 2013. "Aegis Greatest Hits Songs (Full Album)". [online video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tE9y0nP_2Y&t=1733s. Accessed 17 Sep 2017.

Lorienelle Tadiaman. 2015. "Luha Kabit Version". [online video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_pKwxjf2K8. Accessed 28 Sep 2017.

Nekoninz2. 2013. "Luha - Aegis (With Lyrics)". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9h12LGdV1E>. Accessed 10 Oct 2018.

Original Pinoy Music. 2015. "Aegis — Nonstop Music". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNPvV8k-viQ>. Accessed 17 Sep 2017.

Roadfill. 2013. "Sinta by: Aegis (Cover)". [online video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eivRSq_gSg4. Accessed 28 Sep 2017.

Sapphirekraya67. 2007. "Halik (Aegis)". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl4pXROJqUI>. Accessed 10 Oct 2018.

The X Factor UK. 2018. "Sephy Francisco Delivers An Extraordinary Performance". [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCQNg27eiR0>. Accessed 28 Sep 2018.